

RADIOLOGY PRACTITIONER ASSISTANT

WHAT IS A RADIOLOGY PRACTITIONER ASSISTANT?

A Radiology Practitioner Assistant (RPA) is a mid-level health care imaging professional and are much more than just technologists. Their advanced education and training as well as their clinical experience stands them in good stead when it comes to performing imaging and minor invasive procedures. Certainly not to detract from the value of radiologists but in some cases, it's actually more efficient to have an RPA perform imaging procedures without waiting for a radiologist to find time in his/her busy schedule. RPAs can not produce a final interpretation or diagnosis; therefore, it is advisable to have teleradiology service.



WHAT IS THE EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF AN RPA?

To become an RPA, an individual must be a registered technologist with a minimum of three years of clinical experience. They must complete a program of study in a higher education institution recognized by the Certification Board for Radiology Practitioner Assistants (CBRPA) and obtain, at minimum, a baccalaureate degree. During the program they must also complete 1800 hours of clinical experience under the supervision of a radiologist and demonstrate competency in the performance of imaging and minor invasive procedures. Upon completion of the program, the RPA must then successfully pass the CBRPA certification examination, accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies.

WHAT KIND OF SERVICES CAN AN RPA PROVIDE?

RPAs are primary care providers interacting directly with patients and significantly contributing to the totality of quality care the patient receives. RPAs can perform fluoroscopy procedures, minor invasive procedures (biopsies, fluid drainages, placing central lines and injections). Most RPAs also produce CT and MRI scans. RPAs are viewed as leaders, consultants and researchers and incorporate new knowledge into the performance of tasks. An RPA can also provide the referring physician with a unofficial technical report, much like a sonographer does for physicians. This allows immediate action in critical situations.

DOES AN RPA REPLACE A RADIOLOGIST?

No, a final report entered into the medical record must be completed and signed by the supervising physician. The RPA functions much like a PA, who must work under the supervision of a physician. Teleradiology is considered a form of supervision making the needed expertise available for immediate review.

HOW IS THE BILLING DONE FOR THE RPA SERVICES?

If the RPA is an employee of the hospital, the hospital would bill for the performance of the procedures and the physician would bill for the interpretation of the procedure. The reimbursement billing would most likely be done under global billing for the services. RPAs have an NPI number but presently cannot independently bill for services. CBRPA contact with CMS has created an awareness that RPAs are functioning in the workplace.

Protocols for imaging procedures must be available for review and guidance, if needed. According to CMS regulations, all non-physician health professionals must work under the supervision of a physician. Reviewing a case with a physician is considered a form of supervision. RPAs currently working in rural health areas use teleradiology for immediate consultation.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF AN RPA?

Listed are some of the benefits of employing an RPA in a health care facility.

1. Improved patient satisfaction because the RPA is immediately available and has the time to interact with patients to fully understand their medical problem.
2. Provides improved and faster access to medical imaging procedures and services.
3. Patients have more flexibility in scheduling appointments and would not incur traveling expenses; instead they can be seen in their own community health care center with minimal waiting time.
4. Following protocol, the RPA provides timely review of the images for the referring physician.
5. Improved efficiency and quality of care within the medical imaging department, allowing patients to have immediate quality care.
6. Immediate recognition of medical emergencies or critical situations, saving crucial time for treatment.
7. Promotes a team approach to patient care due to availability with the RPA becoming immersed in the care of the patient without concern for other pressing obligations.
8. Allows a health care facility to optimize reimbursement for imaging procedures; thereby promoting an income stream for the hospital.
9. Promotes evidence-based problem solving procedures in medical imaging.
10. Many RPAs have experience in managing imaging departments.



For additional information go to www.CBRPA.org or contact: jvan225@bresnan.net.