

# Frequently Asked Questions About DMS Self-Regulation

Summer 2017

## Frequently Asked Questions

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## Self-regulation for DMS a momentous occasion!

Congratulations to all of the diagnostic medical sonographers of Alberta on this momentous accomplishment of becoming self-regulated professionals as soon as the Regulation is approved.

The ACMDTT is proud to have partnered with front line sonographers, employers, educators, sonography associations, the Government of Alberta and the general public to realize this significant outcome. The development of attaining the privilege of self-regulation



*"Your development of attaining the privilege of self-regulation reflects the dedication and resolution of sonographers throughout the province"*

reflects the dedication and resolution of sonography stakeholders throughout the province, and the years of advocacy and leadership demonstrated by the members of the profession.

As the profession evolves, self-regulation will continuously focus on ensuring that Albertans receive safe, competent and ethical care from diagnostic medical sonographers (DMS).

Your DMS title is protected in legislation, and you can be proud to be recognized by the public and your colleagues in healthcare as being legally authorized practitioners once you are regulated.

**This is just the beginning of the next phase of your professional journey. The ACMDTT is proud to be working with you.**

## Your questions have been invaluable!

We've reached out to hundreds of sonographers throughout the province with presentations about self-regulation of DMS.



The thoughtful insight you have provided the College have helped frame this guide to provide answers to some of the most frequently asked questions.

This guide has been prepared to help you be informed about self-regulation and develop an appreciation of how valuable it is for you, for your profession and for the public that you serve.

## 1. Why are sonographers being regulated in Alberta?

- Sonographers have been asking for the privilege to self-regulate for decades in Alberta and across Canada. After the generation of significant momentum within the profession of sonography, sonographers approached the government and applied for regulation of DMS for the protection of the public in Alberta.



- Sonography is integrated into the suite of medical diagnostic and therapeutic services in the healthcare system. A robust stakeholder consultation affirmed the public perception that it should be regulated alongside other modalities in medical diagnostic and therapeutic services.

- In 2014, Alberta Health approved the Alberta Diagnostic Sonographers Association (ADSA) and the

Alberta College of Medical Diagnostic and Therapeutic Technologists (ACMDTT) joint submission for regulating sonographers.

- DMS is a well-established profession. Regulating sonographers will enable patients, employers and other members of the public to:
  - \* verify the professional registration status of their healthcare provider.
  - \* expect their complaints to be resolved in a fair and transparent manner through the regulatory body.
  - \* expect the regulatory body to manage public concerns about unsafe and unprofessional practice.

***"Sonographers have been asking for the privilege to self-regulate for decades in Alberta and across Canada"***

- For sonographers, this represents a significant benefit:
  - \* recognition as a profession
  - \* a protected title under the law
  - \* a practice permit enabling them to practice legally within the province of Alberta, and validity that they meet entry-to-practice requirements
  - \* assurance of the standards of the profession being enforced, and unprofessional conduct being appropriately dealt with
  - \* benefit of knowing that the public is assured of service from competent, ethical and safe professionals
- In 2016, the *Health Professions Act* (HPA) was amended to include diagnostic medical sonographers (DMS) to be regulated through the ACMDTT. This will ensure that the public will receive safe, competent and ethical care by the regulated and continually advancing profession of diagnostic medical sonography.



## 2. What does regulation mean to sonographers?

- The public is protected, and the profession of DMS is more highly respected through self-regulation. Sonographers have been trusted with the privilege to regulate their own profession.
- Sonographers participate in defining and maintaining standards of practice and professionalism within their chosen occupation.
- DMS have defined standards for accountability and discipline, increasing confidence in their professional abilities and competencies.
- Standards are maintained and enhanced for the benefit of the profession and the public.

***"Sonographers participate in defining and maintaining standards of practice"***

## 3. What does regulation mean to the public?

- Assurance that all sonographers practicing in Alberta are highly trained health professionals that meet established standards at entry-to-practice and throughout the practice of their profession.
- A fair and transparent process for complaints and unprofessional conduct issues is established.

***"Assurance of highly qualified DMS who abide by ACMDTT Code of Ethics"***

- The public has access to a full registry for all sonographers practicing in Alberta.
- All sonographers are required to continue to meet professional development requirements for the profession.
- All sonographers have to abide by the College's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.



## 4. What could sonographers do before regulation begins?

- It is in the sonographers' best interest to be diligent in completing and submitting the application for the "Alberta Diagnostic Medical Sonographers Roster" ***before*** regulation takes place. The window to apply and submit the application is August 8 to October 31, 2017. This will provide peace of mind that you are ready for registration.
- There are no fees for sonographers who complete and submit the roster application during this window. They will also receive a 25% discount on the required "Initial Application" fee of \$100 when regulation officially takes place, and they will have to pay the registration fee.
- By completing the Roster Application ***before*** regulation is proclaimed by the Government of Alberta, the roster will help expedite the sonographers' transition into becoming a legally registered DMS.
- It will become unlawful for sonographers to practice without being registered with the ACMDTT when the Government of Alberta has completed the amendments to the *Medical Diagnostic and Therapeutic Technologists Profession* (the Regulation).
- More information on the rostering procedure, including a guide and the form is available on the ACMDTT's DMS webpage <http://acmdtt.com/diagnostic-medical-sonographers-dms/>.

***"Complete the DMS Roster Application to help expedite the transition to become legally registered to practice"***



## 5. When will sonographers be regulated?

- The *Health Professions Act* (HPA) was amended in 2016 to include sonographers. Regulation will be ready to be implemented soon.
- It is expected that regulations will be passed by the Alberta Government in late 2017, which will direct the ACMDTT to regulate sonographers within Alberta.

## 6. What are the next steps towards the regulation of sonographers?

- Alberta Health is currently amending the *Medical Diagnostic and Therapeutic Technologists Profession Regulation* (the Regulation). Mandatory registration/regulation of DMS will start once the regulation comes into effect. While it is difficult to anticipate how long this might take, it will likely be in place later this year.



- When the Regulation has been amended, **registration** with the provincial regulator or this College will become **mandatory** to practice the profession of diagnostic medical sonography in Alberta.

- The practice of DMS encompasses both direct clinical practice and/or roles such as administration, supervision, management, education and research. All qualified sonographers who operate within any of these roles are mandated by the HPA to become registered with ACMDTT if they have

the necessary experience, knowledge and skills to practice the profession.

- All competent sonographers practicing in Alberta will be grand-parented into the ACMDTT register, becoming regulated professionals. It is not anticipated that regulation of sonographers will have any significant impact on practitioner availability and services to the public.
- The grand-parenting window will be determined by Alberta Health and the College. The College will alert sonographers of this development through their employers and partners (e.g. Sonography Canada, Alberta Health Services, physician-led community clinics and ADSA). The notification will be sent by direct email if the College has been provided the sonographers' contact information. Announcements will also be on ACMDTT website – [www.acmdtt.com](http://www.acmdtt.com).

***"All competent sonographers will be grand-parented into the ACMDTT register, becoming regulated professionals."***

***"Regulated sonographers will receive a legally protected title"***

Upon completing the College's registration process, regulated sonographers will receive a protected title:

- \* **diagnostic medical sonographer**
- \* **DMS**

- It will be a sonographer's legal responsibility to use their protected title in their professional communications.
- Following the grand-parenting window, sonographers who apply for registration will be assessed individually in accordance with a prescribed list of registration criteria that will be published by the ACMDTT.



## 7. How will specialized sonographers be affected by regulation?

- Rules for registration to practice can be made public only after they have been legally established in the Regulation (later this year). Broadly speaking, sonographers who are practicing the profession in a safe and competent manner will be eligible for registration as long as they meet other registration criteria such as providing evidence of current practice, completing an application form, etc.
- The intent is for all sonographers to have the title DMS with a condition articulating their specialty. A registered sonographer may have one or several specialties attached to their practice permit as a condition. This will be reflected on the online public register for the purpose of serving the interests of the public.

*"The intent is for all sonographers to have the title DMS with a condition articulating their specialty(ies)"*



- While the College will have the legislated authority to add other conditions to an individual's practice permit, it will endeavour to continue to be forward thinking and less intrusive in its regulatory role.
- Due to the evolving nature of practice, the College seeks to provide regulatory oversight at a higher and broader level. This 'right touch regulation' approach is distinctly different from creating rigid modality-specific, population-specific or anatomy-specific descriptions of practice (e.g., fetal or interventional procedure assistance). This paradigm

also has the added advantage of allowing sonographers' and their employers' fluidity in delivering a health service at a sub-specialty level.

## 8. Will regulation eliminate "entertainment ultrasound"?

- Diagnostic fetal ultrasound should only be used where a medical benefit is expected and where such benefit(s) outweigh any foreseeable risk.
- Regulation may not eliminate entertainment ultrasound. However, entertainment ultrasound will be out of scope for regulated DMS, as this is not the provision of a medical health service.
- If a DMS performs entertainment ultrasound and something goes wrong, they may not be covered by their PLI. They may also be investigated for acting out of scope.

## 9. How much does it cost to be regulated?

- There is a one-time initial application fee of \$100, and currently an annual registration fee of \$450. (The initial annual registration fee for sonographers may be pro-rated as appropriate.)
- The initial application fee will be reduced to \$75 if a sonographer submits a completed Roster application by October 31, 2017.



## 10. I already have my Sonography Canada and/or ARDMS certification. Will I still need to be registered with ACMDTT?

- The *Health Professions Act* (HPA) will require all diagnostic medical sonographers (DMS) to hold valid registration through the Alberta College of Medical Diagnostic and Therapeutic Technologists (ACMDTT) to practice in Alberta.
- Sonography Canada and American Registry for Diagnostic Medical Sonography (ARDMS) are national associations. Certification alone with these organizations will no longer be sufficient to practice sonography in Alberta.
- The law will require all public health and physician-led community clinics to ensure that their current and future sonographers are registered to practice through the provincial regulator, which is the ACMDTT. No sonographers will be able to practice legally in Alberta without registration with ACMDTT.

***"All DMS in Alberta will be required by law to hold valid registration through the ACMDTT."***

## 11. Do I need to maintain my Sonography Canada and/or ARDMS membership once I'm registered through the ACMDTT?

- It is voluntary to be a member of Sonography Canada or ARDMS to practice in Alberta.
  - Although membership in an association is not mandatory, ACMDTT encourages professionals to maintain their association membership.
- The College believes that membership with one's national association provides many benefits such as participating through a national voice, professional liability insurance\* and widens the corridor for continuing education.

***"It's a legal requirement to be registered through ACMDTT."***

***It is voluntary to be a member of Sonography Canada or ARDMS."***

- The *Health Professions Act* (HPA) makes it a legal requirement for regulated professionals to be registered to practice through their provincial regulatory College.
- When the Regulation is amended, it will become unlawful for sonographers to practice the profession if they don't hold valid registration to practice issued by ACMDTT.
- Once the profession is regulated later this year, certification with Sonography Canada or ARDMS will no longer be sufficient to practice in Alberta, as the law will then require that employers only employ and hire registered members of their respective Colleges.



***"It's not mandatory, but the ACMDTT encourages professionals to maintain their association membership."***

*\* Please note that if you are not a member of Sonography Canada, you can still obtain PLI from other sources, such as Medical Imaging Education or other organizations. We strongly advise that you review the nature and content of coverage from other sources to ensure that it is comprehensive and well considered. The College does not endorse any specific PLI, but we encourage all members to consider additional personal PLI to any provided by your employer (see question #14 on page 8).*



## 12. What are the differences between a regulator (ACMDTT) and an association (Sonography Canada, ARDMS)?

- **Mandate**
  - \* Regulators (e.g. ACMDTT) act in the best interest of the public.
  - \* Associations (e.g. Sonography Canada) act in the interest of the members of a profession.
- **Activities**
  - \* Regulators set the scope of practice, Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice and entry-to-practice requirements legally defined by the *Health Professions Act* (HPA) for the practice of a profession.
  - \* Associations serve and support their members through education, advocacy, professional liability insurance and member benefits.
- **Registration vs. Membership**
  - \* Regulators register members based on legislated criteria. Membership is mandatory to practice.
  - \* Associations accept members based on association determined criteria. Membership is voluntary.
- **Permit vs. Certification**
  - \* Regulators issue Permits which are legally required to practice in the jurisdiction.
  - \* Associations issue Certification, which encompasses criteria to enter into practice.
- **Life-long learning**
  - \* Regulators require members to participate in legislated programs to ensure continuing competence.
  - \* Associations provide members with opportunities for continuing education.
- **Standards of Practice vs. Enhancement of Practice**
  - \* Regulators set standards of practice to ensure safe, competent and ethical service for the public.
  - \* Associations provide opportunities to augment competency for members seeking to expand their practice.
- **Protected titles vs. Credentials**
  - \* Regulators: Professional titles protected in legislation informs the public of authorized practitioners. MRT(R); MRT(T); MRT(NM); MRT(MR); ENP; DMS
  - \* Associations: Issues credentials to those who have completed the certification (credential) requirements. RTR; RTT; RTNM; RTMR; RET; CRGS; CRCS; CRVS
- **Enforcement of Standards**
  - \* Regulators have a complaints and discipline processes in place to address complaints from the public and professional conduct issues.
  - \* Associations provide support to members through offering professional liability insurance (PLI).
- **Advocacy**
  - \* Regulators perform no overt advocacy work. They collaborate with government, professionals and the public to ensure safe, competent and ethical care.
  - \* Associations advocate for the profession in order to effect changes to service delivery, to develop specialty certificates and to increase public awareness of professional services.
- **Audiences and Information**
  - \* Regulators provide accessible information to the public regarding the profession, the registry of members, practice standards and the complaints process.
  - \* Associations provide accessible information to their members regarding professional development opportunities, developments in the professional fields and political developments that affect the profession.
- **Accountability**
  - \* Regulators are accountable to the government and the public.
  - \* Associations are accountable to their members.

*Regulators act in the best interest of the public.*

*Associations act in the best interest of their members.*



### 13. What are the core issues of a regulator? (e.g. ACMDTT) What are the core issues of an association? (e.g. Sonography Canada)

- **Regulators:**

- \* Registration requirements (education, experience, testing to verify competence to practice)
- \* Developing or selecting the competency profile for a profession
- \* Issue permits to practice
- \* Register of members
- \* Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics
- \* Continuing competence
- \* Conduct process
- \* Practice advice

- **Association**

- \* Maintaining Competency profile(s)
- \* Certification examinations
- \* Issues credentials
- \* Professional liability insurance
- \* Professional development and continuing education opportunities for members
- \* Member services



### 14. Do I need Professional Liability Insurance (PLI)?

***"All regulated members must have PLI. The College does not provide PLI."***

- All regulated members must have a minimum \$1,000,000 PLI and must provide confirmation of PLI through their application form and annual registration renewal.

- The College does not provide PLI.
- PLI is offered through Sonography Canada membership or through other sources such as "Medical Imaging Education" among others. We strongly advise that you review the nature and content of coverage from other sources before purchasing, and make sure that that the plan is well considered.

- The ACMDTT encourages you to always hold your own personal PLI, in addition to your employer's insurance.
  - Employer policies do not always cover expenses such as legal defence in professional disciplinary matters.
  - The employer's insurance company may sue you for reimbursement of any money they paid out as a result of your actions.
  - Your personal PLI also follows you if you work at multiple sites with more than one employer.
  - When you retire or leave employment, personal PLI covers you for a period of time during which patients may still bring a claim against you.
  - Your employer insurance may not cover you for any advice or volunteering you do outside of your work.

***"You are encouraged to hold your own personal PLI, in addition to your employer's insurance."***



## 15. What is the Continuing Competence Program (CCP)?

- The Continuing Competence Program (CCP) is a **mandatory component\*** of registration as outlined in the *Health Professions Act* (HPA) and the Regulations.
- The CCP requires that a regulated member complete, in each registration year, a reflective practice review.
- Non-compliance with the requirements of the CCP is deemed to exhibit unprofessional conduct and could place a member's practice permit at risk. Continued non-compliance could lead to suspension of the permit.
- The annual cycle for the Continuing Competence Program begins on September 1 and continues through to August 31 of the following year.
- In order to be in compliance, members must complete all components of the CCP on the online MyCCP platform through the ACMDTT website [www.acmdtt.com](http://www.acmdtt.com).

***"A regulated member must complete a reflective practice review in each registration year."***

*\* Please note that CCP is not mandatory during the rostering period. Once you have a practice permit and are registered with ACMDTT, you will be required to comply with the CCP.*

## 16. What is expected of an entry-to-practice sonographer?

- A competency profile is a document that articulates the expected tasks and skills that an entry-to-practice professional must possess upon graduation.
- The competency profile:
  - provides the professional expectations of a sonographer's practice.
  - informs the curriculum of educational programs, the certification examination and its blueprint.
  - is utilized during the program accreditation process to assess the curriculum.
  - serves as a tool for a sonographer interested in changing or advancing their area of practice.
  - guides employers in understanding the scope of practice for role optimization of sonographers across all care settings.
- A regulator has the responsibility to set entry-to-practice standards for the profession and this includes a competency profile. The College may set its own standard or adopt an existing profile which reflects provincial practice.
- The College has recently adopted the Sonography Canada national competency profiles for the profession of diagnostic medical sonography. This competency profile will be reviewed and revised by Sonography Canada in the next few years and any changes will be assessed by the College to ensure that this standard continues to meet Alberta expectations for practice.

***"A competency profile is a document that articulates the expected tasks and skills that an entry-to-practice professional must possess upon graduation."***

- The College has set the competency profile for electroneurophysiology technologists which was adopted nationally.

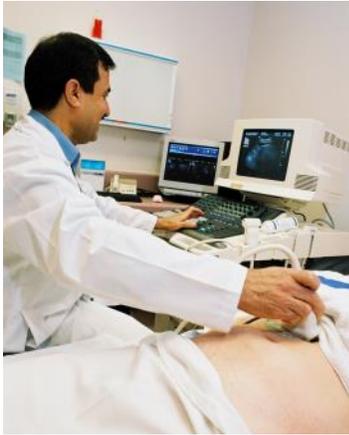
- ACMDTT has also adopted the national competency profiles, developed by the Canadian Association of Medical Radiation

Technologists, for our medical radiation technology specialties.



## 17. What is self-regulation?

Members of a profession are best suited to govern their own profession, based on their professional knowledge, skills and judgement. Thus, it is called self-regulation.



***"Members of a profession are best suited to govern their own profession."***

- Members determine entry-to-practice eligibility.
- Members set the standards for the profession.
- Members identify how to assess competence.
- Members set standards of conduct, and issues of unprofessional conduct are reviewed by their peers.
- Members define all College fees.

## 18. Will any sonographers sit on the ACMDTT Council?

- Each of the current specialties are reflected on ACMDTT Council, which oversees the work of the College.
- A diagnostic medical sonographer will also sit on Council.
- Diagnostic medical sonographers will have an opportunity to vote for a fellow sonographer to sit on Council. The initial seat may be an appointment by Council, until the next College election cycle.

## 19. Do other provinces regulate sonographers?



- Sonography is currently not regulated in any province except for Quebec as part of radiography.
- Ontario and Nova Scotia are anticipated to regulate sonographers with medical radiation technologists (MRTs) in the near future. Saskatchewan is considering this as well.
- MRTs are currently regulated in six provinces - Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

***"Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and Saskatchewan will be regulating DMS in the near future"***



## 20. Where do my fees go to?

- The HPA mandates that each healthcare profession collects fees from the members to meet the costs of regulation. The law is clear that the regulator must be able to perform its regulatory mandate with the fees collected.
- ACMDTT Council (consisting of elected members of the profession and government-appointed members of the public) oversees the financial performance of the College, including determining fees.
- The cost of self-regulation is transparently shared with all members of the College through audited financial statements in the College's Annual Report.
- Like other regulatory Colleges, the ACMDTT is a not-for-profit organization that depends on the registration fees for fulfilling its mandate.

*"ACMDTT is a not-for-profit organization mandated to collect fees from members to meet costs of regulation"*

### **Under its legal obligations, the College creates, maintains and enforces standards for:**

- enhanced professional identity through regulation
- use of a protected title – diagnostic medical sonographer (DMS)
- entry-to-practice (competency profiles and program accreditation)
- Code of Ethics
- Standards of Practice
- Continuing Competence Program to practice
- assessment of internationally-trained applicants
- managing complaints in a fair and transparent way

### **The College also maintains (through legal requirements) and finances:**

- A public register
- Committees that are established by statute
- The Council whose functions are described in the HPA
- Staff and office administration
- Databases to manage the Continuing Competence Program, registration and the Public Register
- Responses to practice issue questions from members/employers to safeguard the appropriate scope of practice



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**Specialties ACMDTT  
regulates:**

**Radiological Technologists -  
MRT(R)**

**Radiation Therapists -  
MRT(T)**

**Magnetic Resonance  
Technologists - MRT(MR)**

**Nuclear Medicine  
Technologists - MRT(NM)**

**Electroneurophysiology  
Technologists - ENP**

**... and soon  
Diagnostic Medical  
Sonographers - DMS**

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Facebook and Twitter**



***Vision Statement:  
Leaders in diagnostic and therapeutic healthcare serving Albertans***

**21. Will practitioners in a non-clinical setting (such as education or leadership) require a different permit?**

- The practice of DMS involves not only the clinical and technical aspects of the profession; it also includes, but is not limited to, functions of supervision, education, management, research and administration.
- Practitioners in a clinical or non-clinical setting will all require the same permit.

***"All practitioners in a clinical or non-clinical setting will require the same Permit to Practice."***

**22. How is the process of DMS regulation being guided?**

- The ACMDTT is being guided and advised by a DMS Advisory Group and sub-

***A diverse representation of the DMS community has guided the process towards DMS regulation.***

groups comprised of members of the DMS community.

- This DMS Advisory Group consists of members of public health, community clinics, educational institutions, major employers, front line sonographers and individuals affiliated with Sonography Canada and ARDMS.

**Thank you for reading this document.**

We hope you find this document to be helpful as you prepare for self-regulation.

It was developed through the thoughtful feedback and questions we've received from sonographers throughout Alberta.

If you have any questions or need clarification, we welcome you to contact us.



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**Mission Statement**



***The Alberta College of Medical Diagnostic and Therapeutic Technologists exists so that the public is assured of receiving safe, competent and ethical diagnostic and therapeutic care by a regulated and continually advancing profession.***