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April 2, 2009

Governor Bill Richardson
Office of the Governor
490 Old Santa Fe Trail
Room 400
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Dear Governor Richardson,

I am writing today on behalf of the American Society of Echocardiography (ASE), a professional organization of physicians, cardiac sonographers, nurses and scientists involved in echocardiography, the use of ultrasound to image the heart and vascular system. The organization was founded in 1975 and has 15,000 members. The ASE is committed to excellence in cardiovascular ultrasound and its application to patient care through education, advocacy, research, innovation and service to our members and the public. The American Society of Echocardiography has 182 physician and cardiac sonographer members across the state of New Mexico.

The ASE supports New Mexico HB 498. The ASE encourages you to review and sign this legislation, making New Mexico the first state to mandate licensure for sonographers, and establishing a new national benchmark which will undoubtedly be used as a model for other states across the country.

There are three (3) issues we feel must be addressed in the administrative rules making process in order to ensure that this legislation sets appropriate standards regarding sonographer training, representation, and access to patient care.

1. SONOGRAPHER CREDENTIALING

Credentialing of the sonographer must be the minimum requirement for licensure. The ASE strongly supports sonographer credentialing, however an experience-based pathway must be available to allow working sonographers to take a credentialing examination. This caveat is critical due to credentialing exams that have strict eligibility requirements based on education, degree or curriculum. These eligibility requirements could pose a hardship for sonographers who have been in the field for several years and may not have attained those pre-requisites, but rather have gained their expertise through work experience.

The ASE therefore advocates that any legislation governing the field of cardiovascular ultrasound recognize both current cardiac ultrasound credentials (RDCS from the American Registry of Diagnostic Medical Sonographers and RCS from Cardiovascular Credentialing International) as the minimum standard for obtaining a license to practice.

Recognition of either credential is necessary to ensure that an experience based pathway to credentialing is available.

2. BOARD REPRESENTATION

This legislation has direct impact on the practice of cardiovascular ultrasound. Appropriate representation of cardiovascular ultrasound professionals on the licensing board is essential to ensure the scope of practice is not violated and the integrity of the profession is maintained.

3. DELAYED IMPLEMENTATION

Licensure legislation has the potential to negatively impact access to care for our patients. To ensure that this is not a negative byproduct of very positive legislation, the ASE recommends a delayed implementation of at least four (4) years be included in the administrative rules. This ensures that sonographers currently practicing in the field have adequate time to prepare for and pass a credentialing examination, allowing them to continue to practice and assuring that the available workforce is not drastically reduced.

Please accept our sincere appreciation for any consideration you can give to this very important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,



William Zoghbi MD, FASE, FACC

President, American Society of Echocardiography