

New Mexico Bill Defeated

The New Mexico legislature introduced Senate Bill 336 which originally would exempt certified registered nurse anesthetists, certified nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists and certified nurse midwives from the New Mexico Medical Imaging and Radiation Therapy Health and Safety Act. It would also allow them to perform medical imaging/radiation therapy procedures including diagnostic medical sonography procedures.

As originally written, this bill jeopardized patient safety by allowing these groups of nurses to perform a wide-range of medical imaging procedures well beyond their education, training, and scope of practice. Without proper education and training, patients could be needlessly subjected to radiation exposure and poor quality images which could result in misdiagnosis, additional testing, delays in treatment as well as unnecessary cost and anxiety for the patient.

The American Society of Echocardiography (ASE) joined other sonography organizations to amend this bill. The compromise language will narrow the scope to “point of care” ultrasound only (i.e. guidance for PICC lines, fetal heart rate monitoring, etc.). After intense negotiations and a great show of support from our membership in New Mexico, including calls, letters and emails to many legislators, this language was adopted and sent to the Senate floor for a vote.

Unfortunately, the amended bill was voted down by the New Mexico State Senate, the result being that the Sonography Licensure Bill passed in 2009 is still on the books as law and is waiting to be implemented. The expectation is that there will be another challenge to this bill by the nurses in the next legislative session. We are hopeful that the work we did this year and the relationships we garnered with the nursing lobby will carry over to result in an amendment that addresses the needs of the nurses (point of care only) and protects us as sonographers.