

Technical Brief Series

How to Obtain Accreditation for Point-of-Care CT Scanning Devices

Introduction

Beginning Jan. 1, 2012, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) now requires that all private practices using point-of-care CT scanning devices obtain accreditation in order to be eligible for reimbursement by CMS. Following closely behind CMS, private insurance companies, such as United Healthcare, are also beginning to mandate that practices be accredited for reimbursement.

Accreditation can be received through the Intersocietal Accreditation Commission (IAC), the American College of Radiology (ACR) and The Joint Commission (TJC). These three bodies have each established their own standards for accreditation.

The IAC accreditation process is ideal for private practices with point-of-care or cone beam CT specialty scanners because, over the years, IAC has customized their standards with these practices in mind. IAC requirements have been tailored to work for both practices using full-body scanners and those using specialty point-of-care scanners for sinus and temporal bone imaging.

IAC Accreditation: Getting Started

Practices are able to begin the IAC accreditation process as soon as they have decided to purchase a CT scanner. To get started, practices can download the IAC CT Standards documentation from IAC's website (www.icactl.org) for an outline of what requirements need to be completed in order to apply for accreditation. Practices can complete many of the requirements prior to their CT unit even being installed to accelerate the accreditation process and submission of the application once the scanner arrives.

IAC Accreditation Process and Requirements: Before the Arrival of the CT Scanner

1. For IAC accreditation, practices must designate physicians to serve as the Medical Director and the Technical Director, though the same person can serve as both.

- a. The Medical Director must be a licensed physician and ABMS board certified in Cardiac or Non-Cardiac CT, or must qualify as an Established Practice. Complete details on certification requirements can be found on the IAC website.
2. Additionally, practices should make sure that all of their medical and technical staff have the necessary education and training.
 - a. Medical staff should have obtained at least 15 hours of Category I American Medical Association (AMA) or Physician Recognized Award (PRA) Continuing Medical Education (CME) credits within the past three years. Three of the 15 hours of CME are required to be related to radiation safety.
 - b. Technical staff should have obtained at least 15 hours of Continuing Education (CE) credits within the past three years. Three of the 15 hours of CE are required to be related to radiation safety.
3. Practices must also prepare policies and procedures documents on facility safety, clinical indication and quality assurance for their CT scanning device.
4. A licensed medical physicist must develop a radiation shielding plan prior to the arrival of the CT scanner.

IAC Accreditation Process and Requirements: After the Arrival of the CT Scanner

1. Once practices install their CT scanner, a medical physicist runs the necessary tests – shielding plan verification survey and integrity reports – to ensure the machine is safe to use.
2. Then practices must complete the necessary Quality Control (QC) testing and documentation. This is done to ensure that the machine is properly calibrated in accordance with the manufacturer's guidelines. The frequency of QC testing and whether it's done manually or automatically is based on the manufacturer.
3. Additionally, IAC requires that six complete case studies – including images and interpretation documentation – must be submitted for accreditation. These cases should represent

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all areas of testing that are performed on practices' CT scanners. The images and documentation must follow IAC's format, or practices will be asked to resubmit the items.

4. At this time, practices conduct a final review of their completed application and associated documents and then submit everything to IAC for accreditation approval.

Improved Accreditation Process with IAC

IAC has worked to fine-tune their accreditation process. They are responsive to questions that practices applying for accreditation ask, ensuring that practices are able to submit their applications more completely and correctly the first time. Additionally, while the normal review and approval of accreditation applications takes IAC 12 weeks to complete, IAC now offers an expedited review process for an additional fee that takes just six weeks.

Accreditation and Reimbursement

Many practices may find it makes financial sense to pay the additional fee for an expedited review in order to maximize their reimbursement. This decision depends on what payor mix practices have. It is expected that, in the future, most payors will require CT accreditation for reimbursement.

Practices can also shorten the approval process by confirming that all paperwork is completed properly in the initial application submission. Using an accreditation specialist with a successful track record of helping practices may help minimize the amount of time it takes to get approved. Delays in receiving approval can be very costly to practices – potentially costing tens of thousands of dollars in lost revenue.

Accreditation Support from Carestream

Practices purchasing a CS 9300 from Carestream receive support from an accreditation specialist who is an employee of Carestream. This specialist has more than five years of experience in CT accreditation and has helped more than 100 otolaryngology and allergy practices obtain accreditation.

Carestream offers practices as much or as little support as they need to complete the accreditation process. The accreditation specialist is available for an on-site visit, and provides phone and email support for the application as needed, with no hidden fees. Many practices opt for comprehensive support to maximize their productivity.

Carestream's accreditation specialist begins working with practices right after the purchase decision is made, in order to minimize the time needed to complete the application.

Carestream's most comprehensive accreditation support option includes:

1. In-depth help with the accreditation application, policies and procedures
 - a. The specialist has templates practices can use for their policies and procedures and can also help complete these documents.
2. QC testing support
3. A final review of the entire, completed accreditation application before practices submit it to IAC
 - a. If there are any open questions about an application, the specialist contacts IAC for clarification.

Carestream offers operation training on the unit as well as a radiation safety course for all practice employees that fulfill accreditation requirements. Carestream also partners with a third-party medical physicist vendor with special expertise in providing services to otolaryngology and allergy practices. The medical physicist develops the initial shielding plan and runs the necessary tests on the system once it's been installed.

Conclusion

With CMS and select private insurance companies already requiring that practices be accredited for reimbursement on CT scans, other insurance carriers are likely to follow. Securing accreditation ensures that practices provide high-quality CT imaging services and that they do not miss out on reimbursement now or in the future.

For practices considering point-of-care CT, select the unit that best supports your diagnostic needs but also provides the comprehensive, one-on-one support you may need during the accreditation process.