Polysomnographic Technologist

Polysomnographic technologists perform sleep tests and work with physicians to provide information needed for the diagnosis and treatment of sleep disorders. The technologist monitors brain waves, eye movements, muscle activity, multiple breathing variables, and blood oxygen levels during sleep using specialized recording equipment. The technologist interprets the recording as it happens and responds appropriately to emergencies. Technologists provide support services related to the treatment of sleep-related problems, including helping patients use devices for the treatment of breathing problems during sleep and helping individuals develop good sleep habits.

History

In 2002, the Association of Polysomnographic Technologists (APT) was voted into the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) as an associate member organization. In 2004, the Committee on Accreditation for Polysomnographic Technology was approved, along with three sponsoring organizations: the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, the Association of Polysomnographic Technologists (now the American Association of Sleep Technologists), and the Board of Registered Polysomnographic Technologists. Accreditation standards were formally approved by the CAAHEP Board of Directors the same year.

Career Description

Polysomnographic technologists use sleep technology as part of a team, under the general supervision of a licensed physician, by applying a unique body of knowledge and methodological skills involving the education, evaluation, treatment and follow-up of sleep disorders in patients of all ages. The polysomnographic technologist performs polysomnography and tests such as the Multiple Sleep Latency Test, Maintenance of Wakefulness Test, Actigraphy, and others used by a physician to diagnose and treat sleep disorders. These tests involve recording, monitoring, and analyzing EEG (electroencephalography), EOG (electrooculography), EMG (electromyography), ECG (electrocardiography), and multiple breathing variables, including capnometry and oximetry, during sleep and wakefulness. Testing procedures may involve applying and adjusting therapeutic modalities such as supplemental oxygen or positive airway pressure and include applying techniques, equipment, and procedures that are safe, aseptic, preventive, and restorative. Interpretive knowledge is required to recognize and respond to respiratory, cardiac, or behavioral events that may occur during testing procedures. Technologists also provide supportive services related to the ongoing treatment of sleep-related problems. The professional realm of this support includes patient instruction on the use of devices for the treatment of breathing problems during sleep and helping individuals develop sleeping habits that promote good sleep hygiene.

Employment Characteristics

Most polysomnographic technologists work in sleep disorders centers. Sleep disorders centers may be located within or affiliated with a hospital, or "free-standing" (in a physician's office or professional building). Some senior technologists may spend all or part of their time scoring sleep recordings, performing daytime tests, and managing a center, but most of the polysomnographic technologist's work is done at night. Typical shifts are three to four 10- to 12-hour shifts per week. The recommended workload is two patients per night. Salaries and benefits are competitive with other allied health professions.

Educational Programs

Length. A two-year program leading to an associate's degree is preferred. However, some programs provide a certificate after a year of training.

Curriculum. The curriculum of an accredited program focuses on correct performance of polysomnographic procedures, therapeutic intervention, and patient safety. Students learn principles of physiological monitoring and the pathophysiology of sleep disorders. Through lecture and observation, they gain experience with study protocols.

Certification

There are two polysomnographic technologist credentials: the Registered Polysomnographic Technologist (RPSGT) and the Certified Polysomnographic Technician (CPSGT). The RPSGT is an internationally recognized certification credential for health professionals who clinically assess patients with sleep disorders; more than 17,000 practitioners worldwide have earned the RPSGT credential.

The CPSGT is an entry-level certification earned by individuals new to the sleep field. The CPSGT is time-limited; certificate holders must earn the RPSGT credential within three years or lose the CPSGT designation. The Board of Registered Polysomnographic Technologists (BRPT), an independent non-profit certification board, develops and administers both the RPSGT and CPSGT exams.

Inquiries

Careers

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Certification

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Program Accreditation

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