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**What's Happening with the Workforce: Is the Projected Sonographer Shortage Real, How Can it be Addressed?
And...What is the State of Vascular Education?**

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Disclosures

- I have no financial disclosures related to this talk

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Objectives

- ✓ Describe current state of vascular sonography and vascular education (and sonography in general)
- Discuss trends in hiring and training
- Review recommendations for developing the workforce in skilled vascular technologists

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A look at the data...

- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report dated 8/29/24



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9400 openings
Expected to grow 11%
2023-2033

https://www.bls.gov/sub/healthcare/diagnostic-medical-sonographers.htm#tab=0

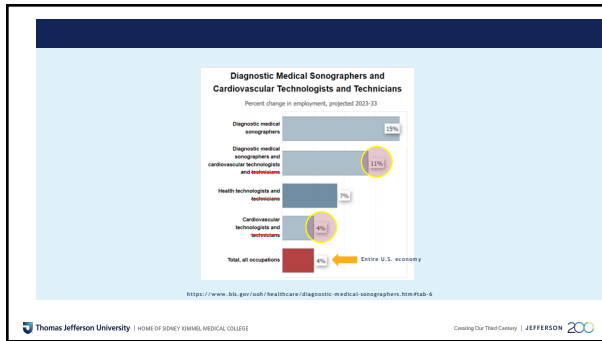
A look at the data...

- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report dated 8/29/24



Openings due to:
Retirement
Career change

https://www.bls.gov/sub/healthcare/diagnostic-medical-sonographers.htm#tab=0



Why the increased need?

- Increased demand
- People leaving field entirely
- “Do you have per diem?”

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Increased Demand

- Data from multiple surveys and web-based data
 - BLS
 - Zippia
 - IPEDS
- Number of US exams exceeded ability to scan them (2011-2021)

Recommendation: More sonography programs

Wells, D., Walker, J., Roseberry, B., Rosenkranz, S., Carlson, E., & Grimal, M. (2020). Sound the alarm: The sonographer shortage is echoing across healthcare. Journal of Ultrasound in Medicine.

People Leaving Field Entirely

NBC news story Oct. 2021

- 4.3 M workers (across U.S.) left employment
- Spend more time with children
- Anxiety
- Businesses closed
- Illness
- YOLO
- Low wages

People Leaving Field Entirely

Many open full-time positions
Change since 2008 recession when many jobs per diem

Net result:
More schools needed but fewer educators available

Schools bleeding educators to the clinical world

Significantly higher salaries
Work-life balance and sign-on bonuses

"Do you have per diem?"

Gen Z is rejecting full-time job offers for flexible schedules

<https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/22977663/gen-z-astwork-captation>

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"Do you have per diem?"

Gen Z is rejecting full-time job offers for flexible schedules

Possible reasons?

- Parental medical benefits
- Live with parents (less expensive)
- Influencer generation
- Parents carry the loans at least partially

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Gen Z did high school and college through Covid

- Burnout
- Fatigue

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Staffing and Labor in Sonography

GE Healthcare (2024)¹ – Current Issues and Opportunities in Sonography

- Currently 65k sonographers in U.S.
- Need over 27k more²
- Retirements
- Leave field for non-US jobs (Epic, etc.)

Experience is everything in sonography

- Hard to replace these sonographers
- Fewer staff = more patients per technologist = more WRMSD = more burnout and sonographers leaving field

Solutions?

- POCUS?
- Artificial Intelligence?
- Cross-training

1 - <https://www.gehealthcare.com/insights/articles/current-issues-and-opportunities-in-sonography>; 2 - <https://www.sdm.org/docs/default-source/resources/work-related-in-accident-related-disorders-in-sonography-white-paper.pdf?sfvrsn=8>. Accessed Aug. 11, 2023

Staffing and Labor in Sonography

- ASRT Data (2023)
- Vacancy rate all imaging/therapy professionals - 13 - 20% (since 2021)

Region	Vacancy Rate
East-South-Central	19.0%
West-North-Central	19.0%
West-South-Central	17.2%
Pacific	16.0%
Mountain	16.0%
East-North-Central	16.0%
Mid-Atlantic	15.7%
New England	14.7%
South Atlantic	12.9%

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Anecdotal Data Collection

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Data by State

- Request for information sent through Uconnect (connect.svu.org/home)
- 10 responses by email and discussion board post
- States: MD, TX, ID, CA, FL, ME, NY, New England

“What is going on in your world?”

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The Data

Northeast US

- Currently have 4 openings
- Local vascular sonography program closed. Another local community college (CC) had no vascular students. Another program further away only had 3 graduates

Western US

- Big demand - but no one will take students
- Too busy, training new hires
- Not enough faculty at schools due to low educator salaries

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The Data

New England

- Salary issues at hospital despite increases elsewhere

Florida

- Many sonographers left field due to vaccine mandates, retirement, burnout, and low pay
- HR departments filter using AI/bots and weed out good candidates
- Many seats in many (pre-existing and new) schools - what is quality of applicants? Employers become leery of students if prior bad experience

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The Data

Maine

- No dedicated vascular labs near Bar Harbor
- Sonographers are multi-discipline
- One hospital had vacancy for two years with \$10-15k sign-on bonus
- Traveling sonographers fill in the gaps
- Local hospitals don't offer ABIs - no one to read them
- Anything more than the basics sent to Bangor
- Smaller hospital doesn't offer LE venous - no one on call. Give blood thinners and come in as OP

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The Data

Northwest US

- Vascular labs and interventionalists limited to big cities
- Many RVTs "escaping" the big cities
- Dedicated vascular programs needed - too many grads only know LE venous
- Consider cross-training from general US or other modality

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The Data

TX

- Stroke care at a relatively small hospital - increased demands for TCD, LE venous, pelvic veins, etc., increasing demands for vascular sonographers and exacerbating shortages
- No longer under control solely by vascular surgery

NY

- 2022 data collection across U.S.
- 57 responses
- 56/57 perform physiologic testing
- Is IAC interested in non-RVTs performing physiologic testing? No
- 21% perform general + vascular, rest are dedicated vascular
- 22.5% average vacancy, 23.5% no vacancies

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Other Problems

CAAHEP Communiqué Oct. 2024

Anti-DEI legislation

- No impact data yet on school enrollment or hiring
- Studies show diversity, equity and inclusion critical for healthcare
- Shortage exacerbation?

- How do these laws affect health outcomes in already underrepresented populations?



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Solutions?

More dedicated, high-quality vascular programs

Online to cover rural areas?

Tuition coverage for grads


Especially for expensive programs

Increase room for growth

Advanced vascular sonographer
Something besides chief sonographer
• QA, research, etc.


Increase advocacy for reimbursements

Higher salaries, more staff



Wrap-Up

What is *your* state of vascular sonography?



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State of Vascular Education

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CAAHEP Vascular Programs

112* CAAHEP-accredited vascular programs (DMS, CVT)

Not necessarily a dedicated vascular program

Many DMS programs have a "vascular component" but not more than weeks in length

Is someone credentialed in VUS teaching the course(s)

*200 according to Poe.com, accounting for non-CAAHEP accreditation

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CAAHEP Vascular Programs

Education Quality

- Credential required in many labs
- Students checking "vascular" box on applications
- Even with minimal vascular education

Physicians

- Different standards, radiology vs. vascular surgery
- What do the physicians want?

Staff Shortages

- New schools popping up
- Lots of new hires - is there lowering of hiring standards?

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Other Considerations

- POCUS/V-POCUS
- Enrollment at US Schools
- Technician/Technologist/Sonographer

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Other Considerations

Enrollment at US Schools

- Anecdotal data related to Covid

- Low enrollment 2021-2022, 2022-2023, 2023-2024
- Back to normal enrollment 2024-2025
- Covid affected staffing *and* enrollments

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Double-whammy

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Challenges

- Paradox of More Schools Resulting from Shortages**
 - More schools = more graduates =
 - More “we can’t take a student because we have too many new hires”
 - = insufficient available clinical sites

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Solutions?

Your data?
Your solutions?



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