Changes made to update learning philosophy and help R.T.s keep up with technology.

BY JOAN REED, M.A., R.T.(R)(M)(QM), FASRT, ARRT CONTINUING EDUCATION COORDINATOR
What...? Again...? Why...?

Yes, changes to continuing education requirements keep happening. Every year or so, in fact. Recently announced changes involve repeating activities in the same biennium, shorter activities earning .25 credits and how R.T.s with new credentials earn CE. Why the continuous change? Because not to change is to stand still. And nothing in health care stands still.

Changes in CE often are prompted by external forces. Take, for example, advancements in certification itself, not just at ARRT, not just in health care, but across the board. The credentialing community looks to the Institute for Credentialing Excellence to set the bar high. Its mission is to advance credentialing through education, standards, research and advocacy to ensure competence across professions and occupations. And ARRT strives to be in the vanguard of the Institute’s progress.

Changes in CE also can be sparked by the need for consistency, flexibility and integrity. Here is an example of each, effective Jan. 1, 2016:

**Consistency**

Previously, only lecture presentations that were completed and reported in one biennium could be repeated for CE credit in a subsequent biennium. Other educational activities — such as Directed Readings, home study and online courses — now will have that flexibility.

**Flexibility**

R.T.s can now earn .25 credits for CE activities lasting 15–29 minutes. This “quick hit” approach reflects research confirming that these shorter time increments are indeed educational and, with today’s technology, offer more activities from which to choose.

**Integrity**

Feedback from recognized CE evaluation mechanisms and providers indicated that a post-test [quiz] with too many questions could compromise the quality of the questions. So ARRT reduced the minimum number of questions required. New CE activities that earn .25 credits will have a minimum of two questions; those lasting 30–49 minutes will have at least four questions (previously 10); activities worth 1 credit will have at least eight questions (previously 20).

**Credit for learning, not for passing a test**

Another advancement — still a couple of years out — will change how R.T.s accrue CE credits when pursuing a new credential. Direct documentation, rather than indirect evidence, will qualify for CE under a new policy beginning Jan. 1, 2018.

Instead of passing an examination to qualify for credits, completed educational activities will be used to qualify R.T.s for a new credential. In recent years, about 2.5 percent of the R.T.s reporting CE took the new credential route.

The policy change advances the board’s CE philosophy to recognize that education is about engaging in the process of learning, not correctly answering questions on a test.

Seeing such policy and procedure particulars spelled out might suggest to some that continuing education is less a patient-care issue and more an accounting exercise. Monica Hahn, B.S., R.T.(T), sees it differently. In her recent grant application for ARRT’s Professional Development Grant program, she wrote, “Wherever we work, we tend to get a closed view of techniques because our practices aim our focus on our own patients and departments. But we can expand our experiences when we delve into continuing education. By utilizing available resources like Directed Readings and lectures, we can gain a glimpse into different worlds. These new experiences will afford us a broader knowledge base that we will hopefully take back to our own clinics.”
There is a well-worn saying, “If you are not riding the wave of change, you will be crushed beneath it,” that is often credited to the surfing culture. Speaking from limited experience with surfing, I think it makes a lot of sense. The only time I tried to stand up on a board, I quickly found myself on the sandy ocean floor with the waves crashing over me. I guess that was to be expected for a boy from Minnesota with no surfing experience or sense of balance.
I might not surf, but my ASRT teammates and I can help you survive and thrive in the coming waves of change that affect medical imaging and radiation therapy professionals. As the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists evolves its continuing education requirements over the next few years, it might seem like the waves of change are challenging radiologic technologists’ abilities to maintain their balance. ASRT members, however, have a partner that has been watching the surf and is prepared. Here is a brief look at how ASRT will adapt to the changes that the ARRT recently announced.

Repeating CE Courses in a Subsequent Biennium

The ASRT’s Information Services Department has worked diligently to update our systems and allow members to repeat CE courses, as long as they are not repeated in the same biennium. This is not as easy as it might sound. For many years, the ASRT’s systems have been deliberately programmed to prevent members from repeating self-learning courses. This was done to suit the existing policies of the ARRT. Many of those measures were built in and not designed to be easily turned off. These systems have now been updated, allowing members to purchase and access Directed Reading articles that had been previously completed. Access the Directed Reading articles you would like to repeat from your Directed Readings page, and purchase a new quiz at 15 percent off the original cost of the course. You can do the quiz online, just as you always have, and the credits will be entered into your CE record upon successful completion.

ASRT also is extending the approval period for Directed Readings. Previously, Directed Readings expired two years after publication. Directed Readings now will be available for up to six years. The content is reviewed every three years and will be removed if it is determined to be outdated.

Soon, courses initially purchased through the ASRT Store will be available to purchase a second time. We are working with our learning management system vendor to allow this functionality. Look for an announcement regarding the change later this year.

CE Courses Approved for .25 Credits

Until this year, the smallest unit of CE credit accepted by the ARRT was .5 credits. ASRT has approved courses for .75 credits for the past several years as well. Starting this year, the ASRT approval process includes CE courses in increments of .25 credits, starting at the lowest unit of .25. This means that courses may be approved for .25, .5, .75, 1, 1.25 credits and so on. This is an exciting change for technologists who like to complete CE courses in small units or on mobile devices.

Later in 2016, the ASRT Online Education Department will start producing a variety of .25 credit units of instruction for sale in the ASRT Store. This will allow technologists to “round off” their CE record if their CE record shows 23.75 credits. For the better part of a year, all of the new ASRT-authored courses were created using a mobile-friendly platform and will play on tablets and phones, regardless of the operating system. Again, look for these .25-credit mobile-friendly courses later this year.

Reducing Quiz Questions for CECourses

A common complaint about Directed Readings and online courses has been the number of quiz questions at the end of the course. Although the difficulty of the questions was rarely a problem for technologists, the biggest criticism was the time it took to complete the quiz. ARRT’s reduced requirements for questions will probably be the most visible change to CE this year. In the past, a 2-credit Directed Reading required a 30-question quiz. That same course will now consist of a 16-question quiz, just more than half the previous number. It is also easy to determine the minimum number of questions for a self-learning activity: It is the credit amount multiplied by eight. No more complicated formulas to determine the number of required questions.

ASRT members will see fewer questions in their Directed Readings starting with the March/April edition of Radiologic Technology. Because the January/February edition of the journal had already gone to press before this announcement, we were not able to reduce the number of questions in that issue.

The number of quiz questions also is being reduced for courses found in the ASRT Store. New products automatically will have fewer questions, and existing courses will, over time, contain fewer quiz questions.

Phasing Out CE Credit for Examinations

Although this change will not occur until 2018, the ASRT is working to modify its CE credit tracking system based on the completion of specific examinations. In 2018, it will reject specific examinations the ARRT has excluded for CE credit. The ARRT also has temporarily added to the list of acceptable examinations, and ASRT has updated its systems accordingly. For more information about those changes, go to arrtupdate.arrt.org and search for “CCI exams.”

Waves of change are in our future, and you can count on the ASRT to be your “professional lifeguard,” not only to make you aware of changes, but to help you meet the challenges. Cowabunga!