Having been an R.T. for many years, I’ve worked at institutions where the technologists were trained in multiple specialties and I’ve also worked places where the technologists were focused on one area of expertise.

My first job was at a hospital that had R.T.s trained in multiple specialties. This is where I trained as a student. When I graduated and became an R.T., I knew there was a “plan” for me to follow to become trained in each specialty. It gave me something to strive for.

With each specialty learned, you had the opportunity to increase your status, which, in turn, could increase your salary. I had a sense of pride in what I was doing. I would have to keep up my skills in each specialty to maintain my position. The radiologists recognized these R.T.s and would call on us for certain exams because they knew we were more serious about what we were doing, and they would challenge and teach us more.

When I relocated to another state, I found myself working at sites where the technologists were focused on just one discipline or specialty. This seemed to limit how much a technologist could help in other areas. Only a few were able to do so and didn’t seem to be rewarded for their extra work, which would discourage others from doing more.

Because the technologists were so specialized, there wasn’t as much lunch relief or vacation time available. It wasn’t uncommon to not get lunch until later in the day when the second shift came in, or not at all if you left when the second shift came in. Sometimes you would have your day-shift technologists and evening-shift technologists all at the same time. If they could be taught specialties, they could help out in other areas until they were needed back in their area.

When I was working at the hospital that had cross-trained technologists, getting time off was never really a problem. There were enough R.T.s to cover each area. When working as a single-specialty technologist, taking time off always seemed to be an issue. You had to check to see if anyone else was off and maybe have to trade days with another technologist.

I felt more camaraderie in the department when I worked at the hospital. It improved my value to my employer and I felt my peers respected me more. That’s why I am a strong believer in cross-training.

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Radiography Provides a Lifetime of Challenges

BY DEPHINE MAESTAS, R.T.(R)

As an R.T. who is not certified in any disciplines or specialties other than radiography, I believe there is a benefit to both situations. However, having worked in both a hospital environment and for a private practitioner, I was challenged and rewarded as a radiographer. My hospital experience prepared me for just about anything an R.T. can encounter. I worked in a teaching hospital that was the only level 1 trauma hospital in the state.

People outside of radiologic technology aren’t always aware that R.T.s are not limited to just taking images of broken bones. We are taught to work in many different environments within a hospital. On any given day, I might have found myself taking portable images of an infant in the newborn intensive care unit followed by a trip to the burn and trauma unit where I had to help a patient who couldn’t move. Since the patient was immobile, I had to work with a coworker to slide the image receptor under the patient to get the images requested by the physician.

I also worked in the fluoroscopy department where the requests for images ranged from doing a small bowel follow through to an upper GI study. When the fluoroscopy studies were done for the day, I might have been called to operate a C-arm in the OR followed by getting paged to help out in the ER where numerous patients had arrived by helicopter or ambulance from a terrible auto accident.

The point I’m trying to make is that as a radiographer with no other certifications in any other specialty, I had the opportunity to expand my knowledge and skills in many different areas within the scope of practice.

Some radiographers become department supervisors or lead technologists in their department. Other radiographers enjoy teaching and sharing their skills with students by becoming clinical instructors. There are many options for radiographers to expand and share their knowledge and expertise without having to certify in multiple specialties.

I don’t think it’s necessary, nor does it reflect negatively on a technologist who doesn’t seek to become certified in multiple specialties. I believe that being an expert in one field can be better than being credentialed in many specialties but an expert in none. An R.T. who is open to change and seeks continuing education within the field of radiologic technology will continue to feel challenged and rewarded in our profession.

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