

Revised Standards for Sleep Program Accreditation: Putting the Focus on Patient Care

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This month the American Academy of Sleep Medicine unveils new Standards for Accreditation of Sleep Disorders Centers and Laboratories for Sleep Related Breathing Disorders. The newly revised Standards incorporate most of the previous requirements for AASM accreditation in a simplified and consolidated manner. The changes are reflected in a revised application that reduces the amount of information submitted. In addition, the site visit schedule has been shortened and standardized. These changes are intended to reduce the burden on programs pursuing AASM accreditation and to streamline the entire process.

Two changes in the Standards are readily apparent. The first is a reduction in the number of standards from 41 to 22. This reduction is primarily the result of eliminating redundancy by consolidating similar standards. The Board of Directors and Accreditation Committee are in agreement that the new Standards maintain quality while sharpening the focus on patient care. The second change is a simplification of scoring for each standard. The tiered scoring has been replaced by “meets standard” or “does not meet standard”. However, the Academy will continue to encourage programs to exceed Standards through a “Best Practices” section of the Orientation Guide and a revision of the Reference Manual.

The General Orientation Guide that comes with the Standards packet has been updated to reflect the new Standards and process. The new accreditation process is described in detail, including information on deadlines, penalties and the proviso process. Also, a section on “Frequently Asked Questions” has been added to address common problems.

The basic elements of the accreditation process will remain the same. The programs will purchase an application, complete the forms in a self-assessment process, submit the application and requested documentation, and undergo a site visit to insure that the Standards are met.

The application consists of some forms, the standards and supporting material. The forms have been re-designed to reduce confusion. In particular, the form concerning patient volume now has very specific questions. When a testing facility and clinical office are in different locations, it was confusing to determine what the “volume” was for the sleep program. Since an AASM sleep program must include a testing facility and a clinical office, the physician office remains part of the sleep program even when physically separate from the testing center. The new form clarifies that the patient volume includes all aspects of the program and the description of each aspect being queried is now more specific.

Following the forms in the application are the Standards for Accreditation that continue to provide the basis for program self-

assessment. All programs are expected to meet all standards and indicate compliance by responding “meets standard” to all questions. If a center does not meet a standard, they should make the necessary changes to meet the standard or be prepared to provide a detailed explanation for the failure. Required documentation and the site visit process focus on verifying the results of the self-assessment.

The section on Supporting Materials has also been reworked. Many programs had difficulty understanding what was being requested, leading some to send insufficient information and others to send “everything but the kitchen sink.” One application weighed over ten pounds and included the entire operations manual for the polygraphic equipment! The revised section requests less information and is more specific about what should and should not be sent.

The application ends with a detailed checklist. This will help applicants be sure that all of the necessary information has been included before submitting their application. The most common cause of delay in the accreditation process is submission of inadequate information. When such applications are reviewed by the Accreditation Committee, the programs are asked to provide additional information to make the application complete. This will hold up the accreditation process and in some cases may add months to the process.

An important new item on the checklist is the Site Visit Itinerary. The program will be asked to submit the names of the chief technologist, two consultants, two referral sources and administrators to participate in the site visit. Identification of these participants on the Site Visit Itinerary is required with the application and every effort should be made to have all participants present for the site visit.

Finally, the site visit schedule has also changed. The evening portion of the visit has been eliminated and all site visits will be done on one day. A specific timeline for various activities is provided to the facility. This should lead to a smooth and efficient site visit for the applicant and the site visitor. As always, the AASM is committed to providing experienced site visitors who are trained and proficient in achieving the goals of the accreditation process.

The Academy leadership feels that the changes to the Standards for Accreditation and the application process reduce the burden on programs while maintaining high criteria for patient care. The criteria delineated in the Standards incorporates use of the International Classification of Sleep Disorders, Second Edition for diagnosis of patients, and requires following the Clinical

Practice Parameters for testing and treatment. The Academy has also adopted and continues to endorse the American Medical Association Code of Ethics for professional behavior. When available, the revision of the Rechtschaffen and Kales scoring manual will also be incorporated into the Standards for Accreditation.

In the next few months the AASM will begin offering an “Accreditation Package” that includes the application, ICSD, Clinical Practice Parameters and other useful information. In addition, a new benefit has been developed for Center Members – SLEEP-CENTERS.ORG is an Internet hosting system where Center Members can create their own customized Web site, using one of 15 templates, and maintain or update this information at any time, all for a nominal development and hosting fee.

If you have been contemplating accreditation of your sleep program, now is the time to take the plunge.