

Safety in the Health Care Facility

Cheryl Spencer

The number of topics that you need to study prior to a certification exam may seem overwhelming. But a biomedical equipment technician plays an important role in several different areas in a health care facility and the certification test is a reflection of that. This article is designed to provide guidance on preparing for the “Safety in the Healthcare Facility” section of the exam.

Documents/Regulatory Agencies

Safety is the responsibility of all members of a facility. The purpose is to safeguard the patients, employees, and visitors in every area of a health care organization. As for the preparation of the test section, “Safety in the Healthcare Facility,” the best place to start is scanning the list of hospital policies that you are involved with on a regular basis. Pay close attention to the Environment of Care section. Although the details of policies vary by place of employment, the topics and objectives are almost identical. These are based on the regulatory requirements by government agencies and the continuing drive to achieve or maintain the standards for Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). It should go without saying that the regulatory agencies are the most influential body to ensure safety.

Clinical engineering departments or corporate policies are great resources for employee safety information. Of course, these will go hand in hand with regulations imposed by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). The regulations might include sight, auditory, respiratory, or contact protection from hazards that are encountered in the workplace. These

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may include providing Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) on hazardous agents, which can be used for cautionary action and responses to exposure; utilizing personal protective equipment (PPE) while practicing universal precautions; or ensuring best practices such as deploying lock out/tag out procedures. Not all technicians are exposed to the diagnostic imaging side of the facility, yet your certification exam might include some basic radiology safety questions so be prepared.

Manufacturers are obligated to provide service and operator manuals with the purchase of medical devices per the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA).

NFPA manuals (70 and 99) are great resources as well. The technician must have general knowledge of the warning and caution symbols within the service manual to safeguard against injury and damage to the device.

A large amount of commonality between manufacturers exists with safety per modality. For instance, the patient safety goal of protection against the intravenous pump capability to free flow a solution is now a standard by the FDA. This type of information should be in the text, if not an addendum. The operator manual may have information on programming or entering data into the device. With respect to the FDA, don't forget the issue of device recalls, hazards, and alerts of medical devices. The FDA will publish the list of recalls on a weekly basis based on the mandatory Safe Medical Device Act (SMDA). So again, it's important to know the regulations to include time sensitive requirements.

Professional Organizations, Publications, and Public Domain

Professional publications and the Internet can also be good sources to access and study as well.

Established professional associations also typically present educational seminars and conferences, which can also serve as a vehicle to communicate with manufacturing service technicians to explore their safety experience.

The U.S. BMET of Board Examiners publishes a list of suggested materials for review (see the Certification Handbook at www.aami.org). Although for obvious rea-

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sons the Board will not give you detailed reading specifications, this is a valuable resource worth reviewing.

People

Don't forget the most valuable resources around you. It never hurts to network with people who have earned their certification and veterans of the field. You can also learn a lot from other interested BMEs through local, state or national biomedical associations or through e-mail listserv discussions. After all, your peers who usually use the reference materials from the suggested list by the U.S. BME Board of Examiners often submit the questions that are posed on the certification exam. Quiz your safety officer as to what is scrutinized on the Environment of Care rounds. Talk to the facilities maintenance employees who can answer, for example, safe use power questions. Also, consider talking to your laser safety officer who will have a wealth of knowledge pertaining to this issue.

Safety is regarded as a high priority at health care facilities and is an important topic on the certification exam. But don't make the study process harder than it is, although you shouldn't wait until the last minute either. Scan a variety of disciplines, rely on numerous resources, and you should have the confidence to do well on your exam. ■

The next certification
exam is on
November 6, 2004.
Application deadline is
September 25, 2004.
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1/2 Page Ad