

Sonographer administered ultrasound-guided musculoskeletal injections – Frequently asked questions

Will the ASA offer a sonographer ultrasound-guided MSK injections course in the near future?

The ASA does not currently offer a sonographer ultrasound-guided MSK injections course. We are working towards establishing evidence through research regarding this scope of practice prior to making any decisions regarding offering a course.

As this work progresses, we will update you on any information we can share. Once we have conclusive evidence, the ASA may look at reintroducing a postgraduate certificate in collaboration with local educational providers.

What more can you tell me about the research on this scope of practice?

The ASA has partnered with the Queensland Government and Queensland University of Technology to undertake research on multiple pilot sites where sonographers are administering ultrasound-guided injections. The sonographers involved completed the initial ASA Sonographer Ultrasound-Guided MSK Injections course.

The aims are to:

- assess practice process, competence, patient safety and treatment standards, and
- demonstrate that sonographer ultrasound-guided MSK injections are safe when performed by a suitably qualified sonographer under the supervision of a medical practitioner

The research will evaluate sonographers undertaking this proposed scope of practice at multiple pilot sites in South East Queensland. It will include the description of minimum sonographer competencies for sonographers to administer ultrasound-guided injections at the direction of a medical practitioner and establish minimum workplace protocols.

The research project is similar to one undertaken for pharmacists to be granted the ability to provide vaccinations within their pharmacies, where the primary focus was on patient safety and quality outcomes for patients.

A steering committee has been established to guide and assist the QUT with this work. The steering committee includes representation from Queensland Government, the ASA, the insurance industry; as well as radiologist, private radiology practices, and sonographer representation.

Does ASA members' insurance cover sonographers in administering ultrasound guided MSK injections?

Yes, the ASA modified its member insurance product in 2017 to cover members for "*the provision of sonography, radiography, nursing and nuclear medicine technologies, including the provision of invasive procedures only if under the direction of a qualified medical practitioner*".

As with all other areas of sonographer practice, this coverage only applies where members are practicing in accordance with:

- state and national legislation
- described workplace protocols (i.e. written protocol)
- their competency and training

Do I have to pay more for my insurance to cover sonographers performing ultrasound-guided MSK injections, even though I don't?

No, you don't. The cost of the ASA's professional indemnity insurance policy is calculated based on the risk of a claim being made against the policy. There was no impact to the risk profile of an ASA's member insurance by including '*sonographers providing invasive procedures under the direction of a qualified medical practitioner*' in the coverage statement when the risk was assessed by AON in 2017. Guild Insurance has found the same in their risk assessment prior to entering into an agreement with ASA from 1 July 2018. The insurance policy covers the broad sonographer scope of practice in Australia and New Zealand as well as all ultrasound streams including obstetrics. This is important, as many members work across several areas of medical diagnostic ultrasound.

Why do different states have different rules regarding sonographer MSK injections?

The medications used in cortisone injections are classified as Schedule 4 restricted drugs. Who can prescribe, administer and hold restricted drugs is determined separately by state legislation and subordinate regulation. Each state or territory has its own 'drugs and poisons' legislation which is overseen by the jurisdictional Department of Health.

As such the legislation on who can prescribe, administer and hold restricted drugs varies between Australian states and territories.

- NSW state legislation permits medical practitioners to direct other employees to administer restricted drugs on their behalf
- SA and WA do not expressly prohibit a medical practitioner from directing other employees to administer restricted drugs on their behalf
- In QLD only specified health practitioners can administer restricted drugs unless a person has been authorised and licenced to by the Minister (i.e. through a *Section 18 approval to use scheduled medicines*)
- VIC legislation restricts the prescription, sale, or supply of restricted drugs to registered medical practitioners, registered Chinese medicine practitioners, registered optometrists, registered podiatrists, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, registered midwives, dentists or veterinary practitioners only.

Why can radiographers inject contrast when sonographers are not able to inject cortisone?

The medications used in cortisone injections are classified as Schedule 4 restricted drugs. These require a prescription, typically by a medical practitioner, which is specified in legislation. Contrast agents utilised in CT and MRI are not classed as restricted drugs and do not have the same requirements.

Why won't my workplace let me administer ultrasound-guided MSK injections?

Even if you are in a state which allows sonographers to administer restricted drugs at the direction of a medical practitioner, it still requires a supervising medical practitioner (e.g. radiologist) to consider this as an appropriate model of health care. It also requires the support of the workplace for this service delivery model.

In all instances, this and other sonographer scopes of practice should be discussed with your supervisor and workplace. Sonographers must at all times ensure that they are practicing in accordance with:

- state and national legislation
- described workplace protocols and at the direction of the supervising medical practitioner (written where possible)
- their competency and training.

In December 2015, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists released a position statement that ultrasound-guided injections are a medical intervention that can only be provided by a medical practitioner. What has changed since then?

In March 2016, the ASA produced a detailed response to the RANZCR position statement and an ASA position statement on sonographers performing low-risk ultrasound-guided musculoskeletal interventions. Importantly, the ASA asserts that the College's position statement did not fully appreciate that this proposed model of sonographer practice explicitly requires the ongoing supervision of the radiologist.

The ASA does, however, agree with the College that there needs to be good analysis of this proposed sonographer practice. This is why the ASA has partnered with the Queensland Government and Queensland University of Technology to undertake research on multiple pilot sites of sonographers administering ultrasound-guided injections. RANZCR have acknowledged that evidence-based research should proceed any further discussion on this topic and that the inclusion of a radiologist in the injection process is mandatory.

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