

INTRODUCTION TO THE ICAEL STANDARDS FOR ADULT ECHOCARDIOGRAPHY LABORATORIES

An echocardiography laboratory is defined as an entity located at one postal address, composed of at least one ultrasound instrument and a Medical Director and a Technical Director performing and/or interpreting transthoracic echocardiography. There may be additional physicians and sonographers. The laboratory may also perform transesophageal, stress or fetal echocardiography.

An accredited echocardiography laboratory requires the interpreting physicians and practicing sonographers to be adequately trained and experienced to interpret and perform echocardiograms. Published documents recognize that echocardiography requires considerable training and expertise (see bibliography). Although published opinions vary with regard to the absolute numbers necessary for attaining and maintaining competence in echocardiography, all agree that numbers of studies performed or interpreted are helpful but not sufficient by themselves to assure clinical competence.

In order to achieve accreditation for transesophageal (TEE), stress or fetal echocardiography, all laboratories are required to be accredited in either adult or pediatric transthoracic echocardiography. Laboratories may submit completed applications for all testing areas at the same time or may first apply for transthoracic and add on TEE, stress or fetal echocardiography at a later date. All areas granted accreditation will expire at the same time regardless of when they were submitted in the accreditation cycle.

The intent of the accreditation process is two-fold. It is designed to recognize laboratories that provide quality echocardiographic services. It is also designed to be used as an educational tool to improve the overall quality of the laboratory.