



Julie Arnold has worked as an ultrasound technologist for almost 30 years. She works at Benefis Health System. Demand for ultrasound techs, or diagnostic medical sonographers, is growing. TRIBUNE PHOTO/ERIN MADISON

Looking into ultrasound

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While going to school to become an X-ray technologist, Crystal Graf did a rotation in ultrasound.

"When I was in ultrasound, I just fell in love with everything they did," she said.

On a typical workday, an ultrasound technologist may help guide a needle to a joint, measure a tumor or check for plaque buildup in an artery. "There's a lot more to it than just babies," Graf said.

Graf is currently going to school to become an ultrasound technologist. She's doing her clinical rotations at Benefis and Great Falls OBGYN Associates, but because there isn't an ultrasound program in the state, she travels to Weber State University in Utah about once a month for classes.

Demand for ultrasound technologists, also called diagnostic medical sonographers, is growing, as ultrasound technologists are increasingly needed not just at hospitals, but at clinics, doctors' offices and other health care facilities.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that demand for diagnostic medical sonographers will grow 18 percent from 50,300 in 2008 to 59,500 in 2018.

"The job market in ultrasound, I believe, is fairly good at the present time," said Tom Liston, lead instructor for the radiologic technology program at MSU-Great Falls College of Technology.

MSU-Tech's radiology technology program doesn't offer an ultrasound

To learn more

For more information on careers in ultrasound technology, visit www.ardms.org.

For more information on ultrasound degree programs, visit www.caahep.org.

technology degree. However some students, such as Graf, who completed the radiology program in Great Falls, go on to pursue an ultrasound degree. Many ultrasound technology programs, including Weber State's, require students to have completed a two-year radiography program.

Brooke Kangas also is doing her clinical rotations in Great Falls while attending Weber State.

"I've always been interested in ultrasound since I was in X-ray school," Kangas said.

She spent about four years as an X-ray technologist before she decided to continue her education to become an ultrasound technologist.

Ultrasound was appealing because technologists play a very active role. They have the responsibility to look at an image and decide if further imaging needs to be done, she said. It's not their job to diagnose, but they do have to look for abnormalities.

Ultrasound technologists also work closely with radiologists.

Doing ultrasounds requires quite a bit of skill, Liston said.

"Ultrasonography is a very operator-dependent imaging modality," he said.

Ultrasound technologists have to

have an eye for the images they see on the screen, but they also need an in-depth understanding of the human body.

"You really have to know your anatomy inside and out as well as your physiology," said Julie Arnold, ultrasound technologist with Benefis, who has been in the field almost 30 years.

Because ultrasound requires more skill, the wages are typically higher than for radiology technologists, Liston said.

Medical sonographers in Montana make a median wage of about \$62,660, according to Montana Career Information System.

Most ultrasound programs are a year and a half to two years in length and students must pass board exams to be licensed before they can practice.

After completing their degrees, ultrasound technologists are required to complete continuing education credits.

That helps keep them up with technology that is constantly changing, Arnold said.

After nearly 30 years in the field, Arnold still enjoys her job.

"We are very fortunate to really like our jobs," she said.

She typically spends 30 minutes to an hour with patients and enjoys that patient interaction. She also likes the variety of cases she sees as a sonographer.

"You're never bored," she said.

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