



Unique Qualities of APEX: Key Highlights Explored

Choosing the right accreditation program is an important decision, and we are pleased to assist you as you consider ASTRO's APEX - Accreditation Program for Excellence®.

APEX provides a complete review of your radiation oncology program, focusing on the entire team to ensure your patients receive the highest quality of care. Assessment areas include patient care/safety, quality management, team training, treatment planning/delivery, equipment and data management. As a comprehensive program, APEX evaluates several areas that other accreditation programs may not assess, including:

Culture of Safety: Errors occur, but in a practice with a strong culture of safety, radiation oncology staff can use the errors as a learning opportunity. APEX supports an open, non-punitive work environment with shared values, beliefs and norms to build a learning health care system. Catching near misses before events reach the patient is the goal, but tracking near misses and patient events provides knowledge to mitigate future incidents. APEX requires:

- A process for reporting all incidents, including near misses and patient events focused on preventing future occurrences.
- Developing a non-punitive culture that empowers staff and patients to speak up and ask questions.
- A process for staff and patients to submit incidents anonymously.
- Appointment of radiation oncology leaders to oversee the submission, review and education on events and safety trends, including management of interdisciplinary radiation oncology safety meetings to provide ongoing education.
- Reporting to a patient safety organization (PSO), like Clarity which supports ASTRO's RO-ILS®, allowing your practice to see trends in patient events locally and nationwide.

Clinical Safety: The safety of patients is the responsibility of every team member. APEX requires systems that support safe staffing levels, infection control and caring for patients in an emergency setting:

- Providing safe staffing plans for absences and supervising non-board-certified team members assisting in the treatment procedure (e.g., students, medical physicist assistants, etc.).
- Being equipped to respond to equipment failure during treatment and responding to patient falls, cardiac events, adverse drug reactions.
- Facilitating transfers to emergency care during and after hours.
- Cleaning radiation oncology-specific equipment (e.g., tables, custom and non-custom devices)

Clinical Communication: Communication is a vital aspect of radiation therapy. To support the full radiation oncology team, APEX requires policies and procedures on:

- The documented communication used to inform the team when equipment is ready to return to service or data deviates from expected outcomes.
- Transmitting initial consultation and end-of-treatment notes to other providers and ensuring timely transfer of radiation therapy records upon request.
- Verifying that the proper image set is transferred from simulation to the treatment planning system and ensuring accurate recording of patient information when using more than one information system.

Information Systems and Support: Radiation therapy is a technologically driven field, and the systems require the same amount of QA as any other aspect. APEX requires policies on:

- Using individualized sign-ins with permissions based on job functions, plus implementing information system safety options (e.g., bolus acknowledgment, timestamp change requests, password-protected approvals, etc.).
- Ensuring staff are trained on system upgrades and responding to requests for additional training to promote optimal utilization.

Patient Education and Referrals: Patient education should encompass more than just treatment options, intent and the treatment process. APEX requires policies for:

- Educating patients on the potential financial impact of treatment.
- Educating patients regularly with oral and written options in languages appropriate for your community.
- Referring patients to specialists outside of radiation oncology (e.g., speech therapy, pain management, etc.).
- Accepting and addressing patients' grievances outside of satisfaction surveys.

Peer Review: Collaborating and sharing knowledge with colleagues within your discipline provides a learning opportunity that can improve the quality of care at your practice. APEX supports continued learning at all levels through:

- Maintaining intradisciplinary peer review processes to help team members learn discipline-specific information from their colleagues.
- Reviewing profession-specific standard operating procedures, feedback on tasks within the clinic and identifying additional education opportunities.

What's Next:

- Request a [peer-to-peer conversation](#) with a radiation oncology professional who has switched to APEX.
- Schedule a [one-on-one individualized meeting](#) between your team and ASTRO staff.