

*Position Statement of the American Association for Respiratory Care*

*Development of Baccalaureate and Graduate Education Degrees*

The continually expanding knowledge base of today's respiratory care field requires a more highly educated professional than ever before. The realities of healthcare reform under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act place additional importance on higher education as the foundation for professional roles and reimbursement for professional services. Factors such as increased emphasis on evidence-based medicine, focus on respiratory disease management, demands for advanced patient assessment, and growing complexities of American healthcare overall, clearly mandate respiratory therapists achieve formal academic preparation commensurate with an advanced practice role.

American healthcare now requires respiratory professionals who can practice in a diversity of clinical settings, in leadership and educational settings, and who can function at a higher level of independence in clinical decision making for their patients. Professional respiratory therapists must be capable of supporting their patients through the maze of medical services and resources which are now available to them, educating patients regarding pathophysiology, diagnostic, treatment regimens and positive self-care for better outcomes and wellness.

Professional respiratory therapists must also prepare themselves for a broader role in community health, health promotion, health maintenance and coordination across the continuum of their patients' medical care.

It is the position of the American Association for Respiratory Care that practicing respiratory therapists and respiratory therapy students currently in training should be strongly encouraged to seek higher education beyond the associate degree entry-level to the bachelors' level, thereby preparing themselves for greater responsibility and greater independence of function over the decades ahead.

It is the position of the American Association for Respiratory Care that respiratory therapists seeking to practice in advanced clinical settings, in leadership roles, and in professional educator roles be strongly encouraged to seek higher education at the masters or doctoral levels, demonstrating the value of advanced learning in their own organizations.

The profession of Respiratory Care itself, the leadership of respiratory care departments and services, and most importantly the care of our patients will be advanced as our members themselves advance their qualifications through higher academic preparation. Academic institutions which conduct respiratory therapy education should develop bachelors', masters' and doctoral programs at this time to support the need for such higher education within the field of respiratory care.

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