

Respiratory Therapist Education

The primary purpose of a formal respiratory care educational program is to prepare competent respiratory therapists for practice across multiple healthcare venues. Respiratory care educational programs are offered at two-year and four-year institutions, colleges, and universities. The preferred education for entry-to-practice as a respiratory therapist should be provided within programs awarding baccalaureate or master's degrees in Respiratory Care (or equivalent degree titles). If such programs are not available, entry-level associate degree programs should offer a pathway to obtaining a baccalaureate degree in Respiratory Care (or equivalent degree title). The American Association for Respiratory Care encourages all respiratory therapists to obtain a baccalaureate degree.¹ Respiratory therapists seeking to practice in advanced practice settings, administration, research, and educational roles should seek higher education at the master's or doctoral levels.

The graduate of an accredited respiratory care program will have an in-depth understanding of human physiology and the ability to apply such knowledge in the workplace and have excellent teamwork skills, which include effective communication with other healthcare providers. In addition, they will have competencies that include the abilities:

- To make clinical decisions that are data-driven and evidence-based.
- To become successfully involved in research and adept at understanding the practical ramifications of published research.
- To appropriately employ advanced medical equipment in the care of patients and perform complex diagnostic studies and therapeutic procedures.
- An in-depth understanding of human physiology and the ability to apply such knowledge in the workplace.
- Excellent inter-professional communication and collaboration skills.

An increased emphasis on evidence-based practice, respiratory disease management, advanced patient assessment, the growing complexities of healthcare, and the continuously expanding knowledge base within respiratory care, mandate a highly educated professional. Respiratory therapists who aspire for advanced provider roles must have formal academic preparation commensurate with an advanced provider role.

References

1. AARC Issue Paper: Entry to Respiratory Therapy Practice 2030.

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