

# The Respiratory Therapy Impact Series: Q&A

## Part 3: Elevating the RT in Your Organization: The Importance of Career Ladders and Career Paths

*Note: The quotes included in this document have been paraphrased for brevity and clarity by the presenters and attendees. While the original meaning has been preserved, some details may have been condensed*

### 1. What advice would you give to a respiratory therapist who is looking to plan their career path in the long term?

- A. "Identify your passions, interests, and seek a mentor to guide your career growth. Mentorship and partnership are key. Explore education opportunities to advance your qualifications and skills."
- B. "Stay open to both short-term and long-term opportunities, knowing there are many paths to success."

### 2. What are the potential barriers that may hinder a RT from advancing in their career, and how can they be addressed?

- A. "Barriers are multifactorial and may vary based on organizational and geographic factors; strong leadership is crucial to advancing RT and respiratory care within an organization."
- B. "A lack of awareness about career possibilities can hinder progress; leaders must actively address barriers and create opportunities."
- C. "RTs should stay proactive, strive for excellence, get involved, and remain committed to advancing their careers."

### 3. How do you see the future progression of the role of the RT evolving in the next 5 – 10 years?

- A. "Advancing the RT profession by achieving CMS recognition, transitioning to a bachelor's degree as the entry-to-practice standard, and expanding RT roles beyond hospitals to align with billing structures."
- B. "Addressing provider shortages by integrating Advanced Practice Respiratory Therapists (APRTs) into outpatient settings to support patient care and fill critical gaps."

### 5. What is your process for evaluating different clinical ladder levels? Is there an annual review of points? Who is responsible for the evaluation?

- A. "Points are reviewed and discussed during the annual evaluation process. This is not a separate process, and our Professional Development Coordinator is available to assist supervisors as needed."

## 6. How do you secure buy-in from your finance team for the clinical ladder initiative, given budget constraints and resource allocation concerns?

- A. "We successfully integrated our initiative with the nursing department, which minimized additional costs. Additionally, we provided data on turnover and vacancy rates to highlight the financial benefits. Given the ongoing shortage of respiratory therapists, we emphasized that investing in staff retention is a strategic advantage."

## 7. How are you advocating for facilities to recognize respiratory therapists with a bachelor's degree for expanded roles? What strategies can be used to overcome this barrier?

- A. "Staff can earn points toward their clinical ladder by holding a bachelor's degree. However, currently, a bachelor's degree remains a preferred qualification due to the limited number of graduates with this credential."

## 8. What educational background would you recommend for a respiratory therapist seeking a leadership or management position?

- A. "Master's in Health Administration or a Master's in Business Administration are both excellent options for those pursuing leadership roles."
- B. "Management positions require a broader scope of expertise beyond respiratory care, including a strong understanding of business operations and strategic decision-making."

## 9. Is there a career ladder available for respiratory therapists working in the Pulmonary Function Testing (PFT) lab?

- A. "Currently, our career ladder applies to the Sleep Lab, ECMO, Transport, and the Respiratory Department. Developing criteria for the PFT lab is a priority, and it is a feasible addition to the program."
- B. "The AARC includes PFT respiratory therapists in their existing career ladder framework."

## 10. Does the AARC provide study materials or courses for those preparing for the ACCS exam?

- A. "Yes, AARC provides resources for the ACCS exam. Please visit AARC University to access the **Adult Critical Care Specialist Prep Course: [Education - AARC](#)**"

## What Role Does the AARC Play in Supporting Career Advancement for Respiratory Therapists?

- **[AARC University](#)**: A valuable resource offering on-demand education and expert-led learning opportunities. It includes the [AARC Advanced Leadership Institute](#), which provides tracks for academic education, research, and leadership development. The institute addresses key leadership challenges and essential skills, as presented by experienced RT leaders, educators, and researchers.
- **[Emerging Leaders Program](#)**: A year long program where participants are selected through an application process and paired with a mentor aligned with their career interests. The program offers formal learning opportunities, fostering growth and connection with a mentor to help advance participants' professional development.
- **[AARConnect Leadership and Management Specialty Section](#)**: A community of more than 1,000 members who benefit from AARC's educational resources, including a newsletter, discussion forums through AARConnect, and opportunities for direct input into programs at the AARC International Respiratory Congress and Summer Forum.
- **[Ongoing Respiratory Therapist Patient and Professional Advocacy](#)**: The AARC Advocacy and Government Affairs program works to expand the recognition of respiratory therapists and the profession as a whole in treating individuals who suffer from acute and chronic respiratory diseases.