

Definition of Respiratory Care

Respiratory Therapy is the health care discipline specializing in the promotion of optimum cardiopulmonary function, health and wellness. Respiratory Therapists are educated, trained and licensed professionals who employ scientific principles to identify, treat and prevent acute or chronic dysfunction of the cardiopulmonary system.

Knowledge and understanding of the scientific principles underlying cardiopulmonary physiology and pathophysiology, as well as biomedical engineering and application of technology, enables respiratory therapists to provide direct and indirect patient care services efficiently and effectively across all care settings.

As health care professionals, respiratory therapists use critical thinking, patient and environmental assessment skills, and evidence-based clinical practice to enable them to develop and implement effective care plans, patient-driven protocols, disease-based clinical pathways, patient education, and disease management programs.¹

A variety of care settings serve as practice sites for respiratory care including, but not limited to:

- Acute care hospitals
- Emergency departments
- Urgent care settings
- Sleep disorder centers and diagnostic laboratories
- Long term acute care facilities
- Rehabilitation facilities
- Skilled nursing facilities
- Home health
- Patient transport systems
- Physician offices and clinics
- Convalescent and retirement centers
- Educational institutions
- Medical equipment companies and suppliers
- Wellness centers
- Telehealth providers
- Research
- Insurance companies

The AARC recommends that respiratory therapists obtain a minimum of a baccalaureate degree in respiratory therapy, or health sciences with a concentration in respiratory therapy; and, have earned the Registered Respiratory Therapist credential from the National Board for Respiratory Care. The AARC recommends all new therapists must achieve these requirements prior to beginning their practice.¹

References

1. AARC Entry to Respiratory Therapy 2030 Position Statement
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Revised 4/14
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