

Respiratory Therapist Education

Respiratory therapists provide direct patient care, patient education, and care coordination. A respiratory therapist practices in various in-patient and out-patient settings (e.g. acute care facilities, long-term and sub-acute care facilities, skilled nursing facilities, physician's offices, and in the home). A respiratory therapist's responsibilities and competencies include:

- Clinical decisions that are data-driven and evidenced based.
- Involvement in research and adept at understanding the practical ramifications of published research.
- The use of sophisticated medical equipment and performance of complex therapeutic procedures and diagnostic studies.
- An in-depth understanding of human physiology and the ability to apply that knowledge in the workplace.
- Excellent teamwork skills, including effective communication when interacting with other health care providers.

The continuously expanding knowledge base of today's respiratory care field requires a highly educated professional. Factors such as increased emphasis on evidence-based medicine, focus on respiratory disease management, demands for advanced patient assessment, and the growing complexities of healthcare, clearly mandate that respiratory therapists achieve formal academic preparation commensurate with an advanced provider role.

The primary purpose of a formal respiratory care educational program is to prepare competent respiratory therapists for practice across multiple health care venues. Respiratory care educational programs are offered at two-year colleges, four-year colleges, and universities. The preferred education for entry-to-practice as a respiratory therapist should be provided within programs awarding baccalaureate or master's degree in Respiratory Care (or equivalent degree titles). If such programs are not available then entry level, associate degree programs should offer a pathway to obtaining a baccalaureate degree in Respiratory Care (or equivalent degree title). Since January 1, 2018 all newly accredited respiratory care educational programs must award, as a minimum, the baccalaureate degree in Respiratory Care (or equivalent degree title). Associate degree respiratory care programs which hold continuing accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation for Respiratory Care (CoARC) are allowed to continue as long as they remain in compliance with CoARC policies and standards. The AACRC encourages all respiratory therapists to obtain a baccalaureate degree.* Respiratory therapists seeking to practice in advanced practice settings, leadership roles, research, and in professional educator roles should seek higher education at the masters or doctoral levels.

*The AARC Statement of Continuing Education, 2015, “The AARC encourages Respiratory Therapists who have completed the required entry level education to pursue baccalaureate and graduate degrees relevant to their professional pursuits.”

Effective 1998

Revised 03/09, 04/12, 07/15, 11/15

Last Revised 03/18