

Respiratory Therapists in the Emergency Setting

Emergency services can be provided in any setting where the initial treatment for unanticipated illnesses and injuries, some of which may be life-threatening and require immediate attention.

Respiratory therapists are relied on in emergency settings for their expertise in a wide range of cardiopulmonary treatment modalities. The respiratory therapist's skills in assessment, airway, stabilization, cardiopulmonary disease management, resuscitation, patient education, and mechanical ventilation are essential for optimizing the care of the compromised patient across all patient populations. Respiratory therapists are educated to provide care in the diverse, dynamic, and demanding environment of an emergency setting. Their knowledge of cardiopulmonary anatomy, physiology, and pathophysiology, as well as their ability to initiate both acute and critical respiratory therapy interventions/techniques, is supported by the respiratory therapist's formalized training and competency verification and established scope of practice. This enables the respiratory therapist to serve as a contributing member of the patient care team in the emergency setting. The skills and responsibilities demonstrated by credentialed respiratory therapists that can contribute to the success and efficiency of patient management in an emergency setting include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Patient assessment
- Initiation of chronic and acute care disease protocols
- Medical gas administration
- Bronchial hygiene therapy
- Medication administration, including intermittent and continuous, as well as oral medication administration if defined by the established scope of practice.
- Airway assessment, stabilization, intubation, and management
- Ultrasound-assisted patient assessment
- Artificial airway care
- Invasive and noninvasive mechanical ventilator management
- Blood sampling (arterial, capillary, and venous), analysis, and interpretation
- Hemodynamic monitoring
- Code, stroke, and trauma team response
- Transport of the unstable critically ill patient
- Bronchoscopy assistance and other diagnostic procedures requiring conscious sedation

- Cardiopulmonary procedure and triage assist
- Patient and family education
- Tobacco cessation education/counseling

The AARC recommends the use of qualified respiratory therapists trained in patient management and complex respiratory therapy modalities to provide safe and effective treatment for the highest-risk patients with cardiopulmonary compromise in all emergency settings.

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