

American Association for Respiratory Care
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Position Statement

Respiratory Therapist Education

Respiratory therapists provide direct patient care, patient education, and care coordination. They practice in acute care facilities, long-term acute care facilities, skilled nursing facilities, assisted-living centers, subacute care units, rehabilitation centers, diagnostics units, and in the home. Their clinical decisions are increasingly data-driven by scientifically supported algorithms (protocols) to deliver respiratory care. They are involved in research and need to be adept at understanding the practical ramifications of published research. Respiratory therapists use sophisticated medical equipment and perform complex therapeutic procedures and diagnostic studies. They also provide education to patients and other members of the public. Respiratory therapists must possess an in-depth understanding of human physiology and apply that knowledge in the clinical setting.

The continually expanding knowledge base of today's respiratory care field requires a more highly educated professional than ever before. Factors such as increased emphasis on evidence-based medicine, focus on respiratory disease management, demands for advanced patient assessment, and growing complexities of American healthcare overall, clearly mandate that respiratory therapists achieve formal academic preparation commensurate with an advanced practice 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 technical and community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities. Training and education for entry-to-practice as a respiratory therapist should be provided within programs awarding a bachelor's or master's degree in respiratory care (or equivalent degree titles) and all newly accredited respiratory care educational programs must award, as a minimum, the bachelor's degree in respiratory care (or equivalent degree title). Associate degree respiratory care programs which are currently accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Respiratory Care (CoARC) should be allowed to continue in good standing as long as they remain in compliance with all other CoARC policies and standards. The AARC supports existing and future articulation agreements between associate and baccalaureate respiratory therapy programs. Respiratory therapists seeking to practice in advanced clinical settings, leadership roles, research, and in professional educator roles should seek higher education at the masters or doctoral levels.

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