

Respiratory Therapy

Includes:

- Respiratory therapist (advanced)
- Respiratory therapist (entry-level)

Respiratory Therapist (Advanced)

Respiratory therapists work in a wide variety of settings to evaluate, treat, and manage patients of all ages with respiratory illnesses and other cardiopulmonary disorders. The advanced respiratory therapist participates in clinical decision-making and patient education, develops and implements respiratory care plans, applies patient-driven protocols, utilizes evidence-based clinical practice guidelines, and participates in health promotion, disease prevention, and disease management. The advanced level respiratory therapist may be required to exercise considerable independent judgment, under the supervision of a physician, in the respiratory care of patients.



Career Description

In fulfillment of the advanced therapist role, the respiratory therapist may perform the following procedures:

- Acquiring and evaluating clinical data
- Assessing the cardiopulmonary status of patients
- Performing and assisting in the performance of prescribed diagnostic studies, such as obtaining blood samples, blood gas analysis, pulmonary function testing, and polysomnography
- Evaluating data to assess the appropriateness of prescribed respiratory care
- Establishing therapeutic goals for patients with cardiopulmonary disease
- Participating in the development and modification of respiratory care plans
- Performing case management of patients with cardiopulmonary and related diseases
- Initiating prescribed respiratory care treatments, evaluating and monitoring patient responses to such therapy, and modifying the prescribed therapy to achieve the desired therapeutic objectives
- Initiating and conducting prescribed pulmonary rehabilitation
- Providing patient, family, and community education
- Promoting cardiopulmonary wellness, disease prevention, and disease management
- Participating in life support activities as required and promoting evidence-based medicine, research, and clinical practice guidelines



Employment Characteristics

Respiratory therapists are employed in a variety of settings that include acute care, chronic care, subacute care, extended care, and rehabilitation facilities; educational institutions; clinics; physician's offices; home care; sleep labs; diagnostic and research labs; and pharmaceutical companies.



Salary

The Human Resources Study from the American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC) indicated that advanced level respiratory therapists with an RRT (Registered Respiratory Therapist) credential earned an average salary of \$57,803 in 2005. Refer to Section IV, Table 5 of this *Directory* for more information, or see www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.



Educational Programs

Length. Advanced level respiratory therapists complete 2 or more years of formal training and education leading to an associate, baccalaureate, or graduate degree.

Prerequisite. Varies depending on degree awarded.

Curriculum. The knowledge and skills for performing these functions are achieved through formal college- or university-based programs of classroom, laboratory, and clinical preparation. Biological and physical sciences required include anatomy, physiology, chemistry, physics, microbiology, computer science, pharmacology, and pathophysiology. Coursework may also be required in mathematics, communications, psychology, medical ethics, and the social sciences. Professional coursework may include:

- Patient assessment, monitoring, and evaluation
- Diagnostic and therapeutic procedures
- Airway management and mechanical ventilatory support
- Infection control
- Basic and advanced life support
- Patient and caregiver education
- Rehabilitation and disease management
- Health promotion/disease prevention

Clinical training in all aspects of respiratory care applicable to pediatric, adult, and geriatric patients is also provided.

Respiratory Therapist (Entry-level)

The entry-level respiratory therapist performs general respiratory care procedures. Entry-level therapists may assume clinical responsibility for specified respiratory care modalities involving the application of therapeutic techniques under the supervision of an advanced-level therapist and/or a physician.



Career Description

In fulfillment of the entry-level role, the respiratory therapist may perform the following procedures:

- Review existing data in the patient records, including patient history and physical, blood gas results, pulmonary function results, imaging studies, and monitoring data
- Collect and evaluate additional pertinent clinical data and recommend procedures to obtain additional data
- Select, assemble, use, and troubleshoot equipment used in the delivery of respiratory care, ensure infection control, and perform quality control procedures

- Maintain records and communicate information regarding patient's clinical status to appropriate members of the health care team
- Maintain a patient's airway, including care of artificial airways
- Remove bronchial secretions, assure provision of adequate respiratory support, and evaluate and monitor patient's objective and subjective responses to respiratory care
- Modify therapeutic procedures and recommend modifications in the respiratory care plan based on patient's response
- Initiate, conduct, or modify respiratory care techniques in an emergency setting
- Act as an assistant to the physician performing special procedures
- Initiate and conduct pulmonary rehabilitation and home care within the prescription



Employment Characteristics

Entry-level respiratory therapists are employed in hospitals, nursing care facilities, clinics, physicians' offices, home care companies, pulmonary function laboratories, and sleep labs.



Salary

The Human Resources Study from the American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC) indicated that the average salary for respiratory therapists with a CRT (Certified Respiratory Therapist) credential was \$56,035 in the year 2005. This same study indicated that the mean salary of all respiratory therapists at entry-level was \$41,537 in year 2005. Refer to Section IV, Table 5 of this *Directory* for more information, or see www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.



Educational Programs

Length. Educational programs for entry-level therapists are usually 2 years in length, leading to an associate degree.

Prerequisites. High school degree or equivalent.

Curriculum. The knowledge and skills of an entry-level therapist are acquired through formal programs of didactic, laboratory, and clinical preparation. Courses include biological and physical sciences basic to understanding the function of the cardiopulmonary system. Included are chemistry, biology, anatomy and physiology, physics, microbiology, mathematics, computer science, and psychology, as well as courses in basic equipment, therapeutic modalities, clinical medicine, and pathophysiology. Clinical training in routine and special procedures applicable to pediatric, adult, and geriatric patients is also provided.



Inquiries

Careers

American Association for Respiratory Care
11030 Ables Lane
Dallas, TX 75229
972 243-2272
www.aarc.org

Licensure/Certification/Registration

National Board for Respiratory Care
8310 Nieman Road
Lenexa, KS 66214
www.nbrc.org

Program Accreditation

Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) in collaboration with:
Committee on Accreditation for Respiratory Care (CoARC)
1248 Harwood Road
Bedford, TX 76021
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