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Respiratory Therapy

Overview

Respiratory Therapy is the health care discipline that specializes in the promotion of optimum cardiopulmonary function and health. Respiratory therapists apply scientific principles to prevent, identify, and treat acute or chronic dysfunction of the cardiopulmonary system. Their knowledge of the scientific principles underlying cardiopulmonary physiology and pathophysiology, as well as biomedical engineering and technology, enable them to effectively assess, educate, and treat patients with cardiopulmonary disorders.

As a health care profession, Respiratory therapy is practiced under medical direction. Respiratory Care is specifically focused on the prevention, assessment, treatment, management, control, diagnostic evaluation, education, and care of patients with deficiencies and abnormalities of the cardiopulmonary system. Critical thinking, patient/environment assessment skills, and evidence-based clinical practice guidelines enable respiratory therapists to develop and implement effective care plans, protocols, and disease management programs.

In addition to entry level skills, advanced level therapists participate in clinical decision-making and patient education, the development and implementation of protocols and treatment plans, health promotion, disease prevention and disease management. Although they practice under the supervision of a physician, they and are required to exercise considerable independent judgment in providing respiratory therapy to patients.

To learn more about this career, watch the [video profile of "Respiratory Therapists."](#)

You can download, save and print a PDF of this career profile:

Working Conditions

Because Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is the 4th leading killer of adults, people with asthma, bronchitis, and emphysema need respiratory therapy. However, other people who have had heart attacks, suffered trauma, are born prematurely, or have sleep disorders might also need respiratory therapy to help them breathe easier.

People of every age need respiratory care - from premature infants to the elderly. Respiratory therapy is provided in nearly all health care venues including, but not limited to: acute care hospitals (where about 75% of respiratory therapists are employed), diagnostic laboratories, sleep disorder centers, rehabilitation, long term acute care and skilled nursing facilities, patients' homes, patient transport systems, physician offices, convalescent and retirement centers, educational institutions, and wellness centers. Some respiratory therapists also find employment with medical device manufacturers.

Salary Range & Outlook

Career opportunities will remain good in the foreseeable future because of the substantial projected growth of the middle-aged and elderly population. As this population grows, the incidence of lung disease will also increase requiring more services from respiratory therapists. Many therapists can still expect to work in the hospital setting. However, opportunities outside the hospital will continue to grow in respiratory therapy clinics, diagnostic clinics, physician offices, nursing homes, and patient homes.

Academic Requirements

Respiratory therapists must demonstrate entry level competency by passing the Certified Respiratory Therapist (CRT) entry level examination administered by the National Board for Respiratory Care. This is required to satisfy the legal requirements of the 49 states that regulate the practice of respiratory therapy. A minimum of an associate's degree and a certificate of completion from a program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Respiratory Care is required to take this examination. Programs are offered in schools that award associate, baccalaureate, and graduate degrees. Graduates of these programs can voluntarily demonstrate their advanced level of competency by passing the voluntary Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT) examination (also administered by the National Board for Respiratory Care).

Professional Associations

[American Association for Respiratory Care](#)

[American Association for Respiratory Care - Be an RT](#)

[Committee on Accreditation for Respiratory Care](#)

Funding Opportunities

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