Respiratory Therapist

Overview

Advanced-level respiratory therapists and entry-level respiratory therapists (also called respiratory care practitioners) evaluate, treat and care for patients with breathing or other cardiopulmonary disorders. Practicing under physician direction, advanced-level respiratory therapists assume primary responsibility for all respiratory care therapeutic treatments and diagnostic procedures, including the supervision of entry-level respiratory therapists. Entry-level respiratory therapists follow specific, well-defined respiratory care procedures, under the direction of physicians and advanced-level respiratory therapists.

Both advanced and entry-level respiratory therapists have the same education and training, and in clinical practice many of their duties overlap. However, Advanced respiratory therapists generally have demonstrated advanced competency and therefore are given greater responsibility. For example, they consult with physicians and other health care staff to help develop and modify individual patient care plans, and they execute patient-driven protocols.

Advanced respiratory therapists also provide the sort of complex therapies that require considerable independent judgment, such as caring for ICU patients on life support. Respiratory therapists interview patients, perform physical examinations, and conduct diagnostic tests, such as measuring lung capacity or measuring a patient’s oxygen, carbon dioxide, and pH levels.

Physicians rely on the data provided by respiratory therapists to make treatment decisions.

Working Conditions

Respiratory therapists generally work between 35 and 40 hours a week. Because hospitals operate around the clock, therapists may work evenings, nights, or weekends. They spend long periods standing and walking between patients’ rooms. In an emergency, therapists may have to work under stressful conditions.

Although hospitals employ the vast majority of therapists, a growing number of therapists can expect to work outside of hospitals in respiratory therapy clinics, physician practices, nursing homes, or home healthcare settings.

Opportunities in this field abound: According to the Bernard Hodes Group (http://www.hodes.com/industries/healthcare/resources/research/advancesurveys.asp), 75% of all respiratory care professionals surveyed found their current jobs within one month and 42% within one week.

Academic Requirements

Formal training is necessary for entry to this field. Training is offered at the postsecondary level by medical schools, colleges and universities, trade schools, vocational-technical institutes, and the Armed Forces. Formal training programs vary in length and in the credential or degree awarded. Some programs award associate's or bachelor's degrees and prepare graduates for jobs as registered respiratory therapists (RRTs). Other, shorter programs award certificates and lead to jobs as entry-level certified respiratory therapists (CRTs).

Professional Associations

American Association for Respiratory Care (http://www.aarc.org/)
Committee on Accreditation for Respiratory Care (http://www.aarc.org/)

Funding Opportunities

Search for funding opportunities in this field (http://www.explorehealthcareers.org)
Enrichment Programs

Search for enrichment programs in this field (http://www.explorehealthcareers.org)

Source

www.aarc.org

Learn more about this field:

Allied Health Professions (http://www.explorehealthcareers.org/en/Field.1.aspx)

Average Salary: $46,000
Years in school: 1 - 5 *
Job outlook: Excellent

* after high school graduation