



CANADIAN SOCIETY OF RESPIRATORY THERAPISTS SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DES THÉRAPEUTES RESPIRATOIRES

Anesthesia Assistant Education and Certification

Position

Anesthesia assistant is an area of practice for respiratory therapists (or other health professionals) that is most safely and effectively performed by those who have completed additional education and obtained a certification in anesthesia assistance. Those who practice anesthesia assistance must have an entry to practice credential (E.g. RRT, RN, CA, PA) and maintain a credential and/or license in their original field of practice (i.e. respiratory therapy, nursing, clinical assistant, physician assistant).

Rationale

Upon graduation from a respiratory therapy education program (or other entry-to-practice health program), respiratory therapists (as well as RNs, CAs, PAs) are highly-skilled general clinicians who possess entry to practice competencies that allow them to work effectively in the operating room. However, the completion of further education and certification will ensure that they are able to perform the additional competencies, as outlined in the validated 2016 National Anesthesia Assistance Competency Framework, which are required to provide optimal patient care.

Background

Currently, approximately 95% of professionals providing anesthesia assistance in Canada are respiratory therapists. Others working in this area of practice are RNs, CAs, PAs and international medical graduates (IMGs) who have completed the anesthesia assistant education program. This position statement focuses on the respiratory therapist providing anesthesia assistance, but does not diminish or exclude other medical professionals working in this capacity.

For several decades, registered respiratory therapists (RRTs) have worked alongside anesthesiologists in Canadian operating rooms. In addition to providing airway management, the traditional role of the operating room respiratory therapist has included technical support to the anesthesiologist for the proper use and maintenance of anesthesia equipment.

Over the past several years, this role has evolved into a more advanced and specialized practice with increasing responsibilities. In many Canadian hospitals, RRTs have undergone additional education in order to perform these duties, often under the authority of their respective departments of anesthesia. A number of educational institutions have developed programs supporting the specialization of RRTs and other health professionals for anesthesia support. This additional education is required to ensure that anesthesia assistants possess the knowledge, skills and abilities to provide optimal patient care.

The Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists in collaboration with the Canadian Anesthesiologists' Society and in consultation with an Interprofessional Certification Working Group that included anesthesiologists, anesthesia assistants with RT, RN CA and IMG backgrounds, and anesthesia educators has developed a certification process for anesthesia assistance that includes the development of a validated national AA competency framework, a national AA exam blueprint and a national standard for AA education.

About CSRT AA certification

Certification for anesthesia assistants is available to registered (RRTs) and associate members (RNs, CAs, PAs, IMGs) of the CSRT who have graduated from an accredited anesthesia assistant program and hold a valid license to practice. AA certification is also provided to CSRT registered members who have a minimum of five years' experience working exclusively as an Anesthesia Assistant and provide an attestation from their immediate supervisor that they have achieved the competencies outlined in the 2016 National AA competency framework.

Once the AA national certification exam is available in 2018, all new graduates from accredited AA programs will be required to pass the exam to obtain AA certification. AA certification will continue to be available to AAs who have completed the AA education program prior to 2018 and they will not be required to pass the AA exam. AA certification will also continue to be available to CSRT registered or associate members who have a minimum of five years' experience working exclusively as an AA prior to 2018 and can provide an attestation from their immediate supervisor that they have achieved the competencies outlined in the 2016 National AA competency framework.

All individuals seeking certification will be required to demonstrate completion of a minimum of 25 hours of continuing education / professional development in the previous year and be committed to maintaining proficiency and professionalism.

Those holding the AA certification professional designation will be required to remain registered and/or associate members in good standing of the CSRT and complete 25 hours of CE or CPD credits. An audit process will be conducted every year on 5% of the certified AAs.

While the title for the Anesthesia Assistance role varies within institutions and jurisdictions across Canada, the title of "anesthesia assistant" has been recognized by the Canadian Anesthesiologists' Society. For the purposes of certification by the Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists, the professional designation for this role will be *Certified Clinical Anesthesia Assistant (CCAA)* and health professionals who have earned this certification will be permitted and encouraged to use the professional designation CCAA. The CSRT invites nurses, clinical assistants, physician assistants and international medical graduates who meet the eligibility requirements to apply for this professional designation. All individuals approved for the CCAA will receive a certificate and a pin bearing the Certified Clinical Anesthesia Assistant designation.

About the CSRT

The CSRT is the national professional association representing over 11 500 respiratory therapists across Canada. The CSRT is also the credentialing agency for respiratory therapists who practice in non-regulated jurisdictions, administers the accreditation process for respiratory therapy education programs and promotes the respiratory therapy profession at the national and international level.

Approved by the CSRT Board of Directors on November 19, 2016