# A Day in the Life of a Registered Respiratory Therapist

Nicole has an important, life-saving job, but her profession is one that most people would not be able to describe. She is a registered respiratory therapist (RRT). Here is a snapshot of how Nicole spends her day.

Her shift starts in the hospital report room at 7AM - coffee in hand, she is prepared for the 12- hour shift ahead of her. With her ever-present stethoscope around her neck, Nicole learns from her co-worker, who is finishing the night shift, about the patient requirements for the day. She will assess and adjust the oxygen therapy and mechanical ventilation on numerous patients, perform diagnostic tests on others, educate patients and their caregivers on the various treatments and disease conditions, and provide emergency care as needed. As a member of an interprofessional healthcare team, she will consult with various other team members including doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, speech language pathologists, pharmacists, dieticians and (most importantly), patients.

At 7:15 AM, just as the report is finished, a “Code Blue” is called in the emergency room. Nicole rushes to ER. She proceeds to intubate and ventilate the patient, to keep his airway open and keep him breathing. After 40 minutes of constant efforts to resuscitate the patient, the team is unsuccessful. His grieving family arrives and as Nicole holds back tears they say “thank you for trying to save him”.

It’s now 8:05 AM. Nicole heads off to begin working with patients on her team. As she enters the unit, her pager goes off. She is needed to attend a delivery for a premature infant. The baby is born at just 31 weeks, but cries vigorously. Nicole gives the baby oxygen and positive pressure to open up her tiny lungs. The baby begins breathing, but will need some ongoing support. She will be transferred to the Special Care Nursery where Nicole’s colleague, Raj, will set-up non-invasive ventilation to support her breathing as her tiny lungs continue to grow and mature.

Throughout the rest of Nicole’s shift she educates a patient with COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) about his inhaled medications and discusses smoking cessation options. She takes an arterial blood gas and consults with a home care RRT who will be setting up home oxygen for a patient being discharged. Nicole monitors patients in the intensive care unit on mechanical ventilators. She assesses patients that require oxygen and those with artificial airways such as tracheostomy tubes. She educates patients and other health care professionals about their care.

Nicole and Raj join their colleagues for shift report at the end of the day. They will both go home, ready to return the next night for another 12-hour shift where they will care for a new set of patients with diverse needs.

Not every respiratory therapist has a shift like Nicole. Respiratory therapists work in diverse settings ranging from home and community care to diagnostic clinics to the operating room. Respiratory therapists are advocates for their patients and profession. They are clinicians, educators and researchers with a unique skill set. Regardless of their area of practice, Nicole and her RRT colleagues have completed rigorous training programs which follow a national standard.

The cycle of life and death is one of the profound and amazing things that a respiratory therapist gets to impact in the course of a day’s work. Whether it is in acute care, health prevention and promotion or diagnostic testing, the message is the same - respiratory therapists are dedicated to better breathing.

In (**name the City**) there are (**give number)** RTs working in health care facilities assessing, monitoring and treating individuals with respiratory and cardio-respiratory disorders. For more information on respiratory therapy, please visit [www.csrt.com](http://www.csrt.com).