



CANADIAN SOCIETY OF RESPIRATORY THERAPISTS

SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DES THÉRAPEUTES RESPIRATOIRES

July 28, 2020

The Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building, Queens Park
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1A1

Re: Anesthesia Assistants on the Front Lines of Ontario's COVID-19 Response

Dear Premier:

The Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists (CSRT) would like to take this opportunity to commend the provincial government on its ongoing well coordinated response regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. This letter is a follow up to our April 26, 2020 letter advocating for respiratory therapists to be included in the pandemic pay for frontline workers fighting COVID-19 in Ontario. Respiratory therapists met the news that they would be eligible for pandemic pay with appreciation. It would appear, however, that a group of respiratory therapists and registered nurses who work in anesthesia assistance have been subsequently excluded. Recognizing this omission may simply be an oversight, this letter is to request that it be corrected immediately and that these professionals be included this list of those eligible for pandemic pay for frontline workers.

Anesthesia assistance is an area of practice for some registered respiratory therapists and registered nurses. This area of practice is often described under the job title or job description of "anesthesia assistant". This job title is analogous to titles used by registered nurses in other areas of practice. (e.g. "patient educator" or "clinical educator"). We have been informed that these other job titles (patient educator, clinical educator) are included on the list of professionals eligible for pandemic pay.

The CSRT administers the national certification program for anesthesia assistants. The CSRT advocates for registered respiratory therapists and registered nurses working in this area of practice. Ensuring anesthesia assistants receive recognition for their contributions to the healthcare system is a top priority of the CSRT.

Registered respiratory therapists (RRTs) and registered nurses (RNs) working as anesthesia assistants have completed additional education and training in anesthesia assistance in order to fulfill their role. They retain their licenses as RRTs and RNs and are required to meet all licensure requirements annually. Their job description/title of "anesthesia assistant" does not preclude their RRT or RN credential.

Anesthesia assistants function under the supervision of anesthesiologists, but perform a role that extends

beyond simply providing assistance to these physicians. They function with autonomy to perform many of their responsibilities, including providing medications, performing airway management and monitoring patients. The full scope of practice for registered respiratory therapists and registered nurses working as anesthesia assistants is described in the [National Competency Framework](#) in Anesthesia Assistance, nationally validated document.

While it is noted that many surgeries and other procedures requiring the expertise of anesthesia assistants have been cancelled during the pandemic, it must also be noted that anesthesia assistants continue to work in frontline areas of an essential or urgent nature. Anesthesia assistants monitor patients and provide airway and anesthesia management during critical procedures such as transesophageal echocardiography, pacemaker insertion and electroshock therapy. Anesthesia assistants continue to perform their role during urgent surgical cases and in COVID-dedicated operating rooms. Furthermore, anesthesia assistants have been reallocated from their pre-pandemic duties to perform airway management for unstable patients who are COVID-19 positive. Their role throughout the pandemic requires them to be positioned at the head of the patient while performing aerosol-generating medical procedures. Undoubtedly, they are essential frontline workers, working with some of the most critically ill patients.

Anesthesia assistants in Ontario performed a critical role preparing for the pandemic, creating specialized emergency kits for airway management, drug administration and invasive monitoring line insertion. They were also instrumental in the creation of operating rooms dedicated to patients with COVID-19. Their knowledge and expertise contributed to the overall preparedness of the province for the pandemic, and created important means of minimizing response times and possible contamination during emergent procedures.

Respiratory therapists and nurses working as anesthesia assistants are essential members of the Ontario health care workforce, working alongside other respiratory therapists, nurses, doctors, and interprofessional colleagues to assure safe and effective care for those affected during this time of unprecedented challenge. It is imperative that their essential contributions and expertise be recognized alongside those of their colleagues eligible for pandemic pay.

On behalf of the CSRT, I would like to thank you in advance for your consideration of this matter. Should you like to discuss this further please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew West", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Andrew West, CEO
Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists

Cc: The Hon. Christine Elliot
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health