



Position Statement Degree as entry-to-practice

The Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists (CSRT) advocates for a degree as entry-to-practice for respiratory therapists (RTs) and actively supports provincial health and education stakeholders in achieving this goal.

As the national professional association for respiratory therapists and the credentialing body for non-regulated provinces, the CSRT believes that graduates should have the knowledge, skills and professional judgement in all practice settings within the field of respiratory therapy. The CSRT supports learning outcomes that are reflective of current practice, through the promotion of safe and best practice as outlined in the National Competency Profile. The CSRT advocates for a multi-skilled respiratory therapist that can adapt easily to the evolving complexities of the health care environment.

Skills, knowledge and judgement to work in a complex health care environment.

The health care environments have become more complex and diverse due to advances in research, the evolution of medical therapies and technology and the increasing complexity and acuity of clinical respiratory care. As such, entry-to-practice respiratory therapists require advanced knowledge which is not provided in diploma-level education. Examples of knowledge acquisition that is enhanced through a degree program include:

- Broader knowledge of the Canadian health care system and current health care issues;
- Enhanced knowledge and professional judgement relative to medical ethics and privacy legislation;
- Enhanced communication skills to work effectively with more informed patients and families;
- Enhanced knowledge, skills and professional judgement to work more effectively within the interprofessional team;
- Enhanced critical thinking and independent decision-making skills;
- Better comprehension of health promotion and prevention; acting as role models and mentors for colleagues, patients and other health care professionals;
- Sufficient knowledge about research to contribute to evidence-based decisions; the ability to critically evaluate evidence and apply to daily practice;
- Enhanced understanding of research project development, implementation and evaluation.
- Enhanced leadership and management skills including: systems analysis and organizational behaviour, budgeting, risk management, and strategic thinking ;

- Effective interprofessional collaboration, teamwork and conflict resolution skills;
- Improved understanding of patient safety initiatives and quality improvement principles;
- Enhanced understanding and commitment to lifelong learning and continuing professional development.

The CSRT advocates for high standards of practice for the profession and harmonization of standards across all Canadian provinces and territories. A degree graduate will have the foundational knowledge required to meet the needs of the national health care sector.

Employers require qualified health care professionals

Employers require an entry-level respiratory therapist who has the critical knowledge and clinical judgement, problem-solving, adaptability and leadership qualities to provide safe and effective patient care in a multifaceted healthcare environment.

Creating a level playing field in the health care sector

A degree as entry-to-practice will enable respiratory therapists to align with other health care professionals in terms of academic standards and involvement in critical thinking and decision-making through interprofessional collaboration.

A degree education will provide respiratory therapists with equal opportunities for advancement in health care teams; management positions; employment in other provinces and countries, pursuit of post-graduate education and be leaders in respiratory related research.

Improvements in patient care

A recent report from the Canadian Institute of Health Information (CIHI) entitled *Respiratory Disease in Canada*¹ states that

“Canada is facing a wave of chronic respiratory diseases. Since many of these diseases affect adults over the age of 65, the number of people with respiratory diseases will increase as the population ages. The corresponding increase in demand for services will pose a significant challenge for the health care system.”

With the increasing incidence of chronic respiratory diseases and the complexity of preventing, treating and effectively managing this population in Canada, there is an increasing demand for respiratory therapists who have the appropriate level of education to meet these challenges. The CSRT recognizes that respiratory therapists must have a broader scope of knowledge, critical thinking and independent decision making skills to provide optimal care in the future.

Current role and responsibilities of the respiratory therapist

Respiratory therapists are health care professionals who assess, monitor and treat individuals with respiratory and cardio-respiratory disorders. Respiratory therapists are vital members of

¹ CIHI et al. September 2001, *Respiratory Disease in Canada*.

the health care team. They work in hospitals' intensive care units, neonatal units, operating rooms, general wards, coronary care units and emergency departments. Respiratory therapists also work in the community in areas such as family health teams, home care, and sleep labs. Respiratory therapists treat patients of all ages, from infants and children to adults, including geriatric patients.

Respiratory therapists must have the skills, knowledge and judgment to:

- Maintain an open airway for trauma, intensive care, and surgery patients.
- Assist in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and support of critically ill patients.
- Provide life support for patients who cannot breathe on their own.
- Attend high risk births and assist babies who have breathing problems.
- Stabilize high risk patients being moved by air or ground ambulance.
- Provide assistance in the delivery of general anaesthesia procedures.
- Administer inhaled drugs and medical gases such as asthma medication and oxygen.
- Conduct tests to measure lung function.
- Teach people how to manage their chronic lung disease or to quit smoking.
- Provide in-home respiratory care to adults and children.

In addition to their vast health care knowledge and highly developed technical and clinical skills, respiratory therapists also require critical thinking and decision-making skills, good judgment, excellent interpersonal skills, and the ability to maintain composure in critical medical situations.

About the CSRT

The CSRT is the national professional association representing approximately 3,200 respiratory therapists across Canada. The CSRT is also the credentialing agency for RTs who practice in non-regulated jurisdictions and administers the accreditation process for respiratory therapy education program.

Approval by CSRT Board of Directors

This position statement was approved by the Board of Directors of the Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists on September 15, 2012.