



CANADIAN SOCIETY OF RESPIRATORY THERAPISTS

SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DES THÉRAPEUTES RESPIRATOIRES

-for immediate release-

Canada's healthcare system is in peril: Respiratory therapists are part of the solution.

[OTTAWA – March 18, 2022] The COVID-19 pandemic continues to place Canada's healthcare system, and those who work within it, under excessive strain. Across the country, the healthcare system has been stretched to its limits and in many cases, overwhelmed. Canadians are still being required to delay necessary care, and health care workers are showing signs of being burnt out. Canada's respiratory therapists have been particularly impacted due to the pressures placed upon them by the ongoing surges in healthcare demands – surges that continue as public health restrictions are relaxed

Respiratory therapists are specialists in cardiorespiratory care and are essential to the provision of care across our healthcare systems. Throughout the pandemic, they have been caring for those with COVID-19, particularly those who become critically ill. Twelve thousand of these professionals have remained on the front lines throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, providing exceptional care during exceptional circumstances. Respiratory therapists provide life-saving treatments including oxygen therapy, airway insertion and mechanical ventilation for patients who are no longer able to breathe for themselves. It is imperative for the health of Canadians that respiratory therapists remain available to provide this expert care now more than ever.

The burden being experienced by respiratory therapists has become more and more evident. Recent surveys indicate that 90 of respiratory therapists are concerned about the impacts of the pandemic on their own mental health. "From the first days of the pandemic there have been concerns over the mental health strain the pandemic would likely place on respiratory therapists; we are now witnessing those impacts", according to Dr. Andrew West, CEO of the Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists (CSRT).

While lifesaving equipment such as ventilators has been available across the country, a new crisis emerged relating to the human resources necessary to provide care and appropriately utilize that equipment. The CSRT reports that recently 38% of respiratory therapists across Canada are considering leaving their career in healthcare amidst the pressures. "Early on there was important action taken by governments to address urgent needs in the healthcare systems for equipment, including ventilators. With hospitalization and ICU rates remaining high as we pass the two year anniversary of the pandemic, there is sustained pressure on respiratory therapists. What is needed now is support for the respiratory therapists themselves, without whom there would be no one to operate those ventilators", notes West.

Recently, the Canadian Medical Association together with organizations representing health workers across the country called upon governments and health organizations need to urgently

work together to support our health workers now and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The issues being faced by the health workforce are worsening and concrete commitments to address the issues in a sustainable manner are lagging. Key priorities identified include: creating a robust data source of health human resources; implementing a multi-disciplinary nationwide health human resource strategy; and committing to transform Canada's health care system for the future.

Government and healthcare leaders too often fail to recognize that the Canadian healthcare system is not just doctors and nurses. Government support, recognition, employment incentives, and workforce planning policies routinely focus on doctors and nurses, failing to address critical impacts on respiratory therapists across the country. Our healthcare system relies on respiratory therapists and is in peril without them.

Respiratory therapists and other healthcare workers can no longer be asked to carry the excessive burden of this pandemic. With sustained stressful working conditions and insufficient recognition and support from government and healthcare leaders, respiratory therapists are burning out. "We all share a common goal of safeguarding our healthcare system through this crisis and beyond, and respiratory therapists are essential toward meeting this goal" said West. "The CSRT looks forward to working with all levels of government in the future".

-30-

The Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists (CSRT) is the national professional association representing the nation's 12,000 respiratory therapists. It has been helping its members prepare for this pandemic since news of the coronavirus broke in late 2019. From informing and advising governments, to providing resources to its members across the country, the CSRT has taken a leadership role in ensuring Canadians receive world class respiratory care throughout this crisis.

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