

THE RESPIRATORY THERAPIST PERSPECTIVE: A SURVEY OF CANADIAN RRTs WORKING IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Though COVID-19 is largely a respiratory illness, and RRTs are at the forefront of the pandemic, the RRT perspective has not been studied.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 presents largely as respiratory and cardiopulmonary symptoms¹. Respiratory therapists (RRTs) are involved in the care of nearly all hospitalized COVID-19 patients, as well as in many out-of-hospital settings. Though RRTs are at the forefront of the pandemic, the experiences and challenges specific to the profession have not been observed individually.

Hypotheses

- RRTs have their own individual challenges, concerns and stresses.
- RRTs are at a significant risk of exposure
- Concerns about access to personal protective equipment (PPE), exposure to the disease for themselves, and exposure to their families would be most common.
- This summarized data will provide information that may be useful to all RRTs and other front line health professionals.

METHODS

1. Institutional Research Ethics Board approval
2. Cross-sectional survey created through survey software Redcap: available online from May 29 to July 6, 2020 to RRTs working in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic or preparation period
3. Survey distributed by various professional societies, provincial regulatory bodies, and through social media.
4. Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS

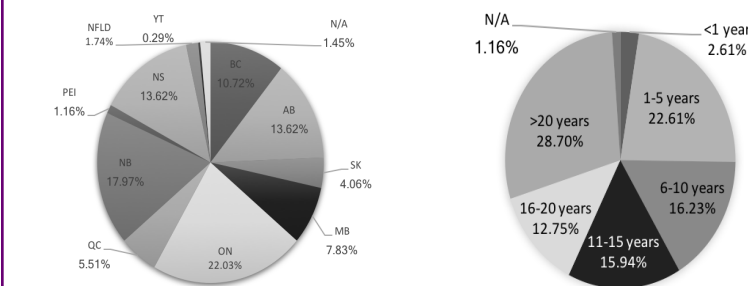
Figure 1 Physical risks faced by RRTs



Figure 2 Psychosocial risks faced by RRTs



Figure 3 Results of respondents by province and years of work experience



DISCUSSION

- More than half of RRTs were involved in the care of COVID+ patients, sometimes performing or assisting with endotracheal intubation and extubation; one of the highest-risk moments for contracting COVID-19².
- Being involved in these high-risk procedures, combined with shortages in PPE and other resources left RRTs feeling anxious and fearful about the risk of infection to themselves or their family members.
- RRTs reported feeling most overwhelmed by the constant influx of new information, continuously changing guidelines, and conflicting information from various sources within their institution.

CONCLUSION: Despite working more, RRTs are being stretched very thin, and feel stressed, anxious, overwhelmed and worried about their personal safety.

REFERENCES

1. Zheng, Y. Y., et al. (2020). *Nature Reviews Cardiology*, 17(5), 259-260.
2. Weissman, D. N., et al. (2020). *Jama*, 323(20), 2027-2028.