

MAHCP Career Profile

Respiratory Therapist

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Respiratory therapy is a relatively young profession. Founded in 1964 by a small group of technicians in Montreal, the professional society was initially known as the Canadian Society of Inhalation Therapy Technicians. From this small group Respiratory Therapy has grown to a membership of over 7,000 Respiratory Therapists across Canada, of which over 200 are employed in Manitoba.

The profession's identity has metamorphasized over the years from a technical occupation, where technologists would perform hands-on repairs and trouble-shooting of respiratory related equipment, to where they now perform direct patient care and a leadership role in patient care management.

There are 17 schools of Respiratory Therapy across Canada of which the Manitoba program is based out of the University of Manitoba. The U of M program is a four year degree program of which the first year is University I and the following three years of Respiratory Therapy is through the Faculty of Med Rehab. Upon successful completion of the program graduates are eligible to write the Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapy national credentialing exam and are eligible to be licensed to practice in Manitoba.

The majority of Respiratory therapists are employed in the hospital setting of which approximately 90% of the work is in Critical Care. Respiratory Therapists are a vital part of critical care rounds and are often consulted by attending physicians for their expertise in ventilatory management and support.

Advances are being made using Respiratory Therapy administered nitric oxide therapy and artificial surfactant therapy.

When a patient is in severe distress, a Respiratory Therapist will be one of the first of a team of health care professionals on the scene. Respiratory Therapists are part of the hospital code "99" and "88" team that provide life saving care to patients in severe cardiac and respiratory distress.

When babies are delivered in the northern locations they may be too ill to be managed with the resources available. Respiratory Therapists are called upon as part of the neonatal air transport team to bring these tiny patients to Winnipeg; often done under less than desirable weather conditions.

Therapists practicing on the wards provide assessment and management for patients requiring bronchodilator therapy or oxygen therapy. Respiratory Therapists provide service 24 hours a day including overnight oximetry studies as a tool to diagnose respiratory conditions such as sleep apnea.

Therapists working in the pulmonary function labs are a vital link in the diagnoses and treatment of respiratory disease. Using state of the art equipment, therapists do a variety of tests to assess patient lung function in disease states such as asthma, COPD and sleep apnea.

Patient teaching is vital to the proper management of respiratory disease and Respiratory Therapists are often called upon as lead educators. It still amazes us as to how many patients arrive in a hospital emergency department in extreme distress, simply because they weren't using their inhalers properly.

Respiratory Therapists can now be found in the homes of patients under home care programs through government programs as well as privately run companies. The skills of Respiratory Therapists as coaches and educators providing technical as well as emotional support are vital to the overall well-being of the patient and their families.

New products and technologies for Respiratory Therapists are continually being developed and marketed by health care supply companies and pharmaceuti-

cal companies. With their expertise in this area Respiratory Therapists are in high demand for product marketing and education.

The education and training of Respiratory Therapists is highly recognized and valued; opening the door for greater responsibility and opportunity. Respiratory Therapists have taken the lead responsibility in inter-facility Critical Care Transport, a role traditionally performed by an Emergency Physician. The education and training of Respiratory Therapists qualifies a therapist to apply for the Perfusion Program or the Physician Assistant Program, both of which demand a high degree of responsibility and education.

If you enjoy travel, opportunities are available for Respiratory Therapists to transport critically ill patients on "life flight" to and from locations all over the world. Respiratory Therapists are in high demand in exotic locations such as Saudi Arabia where salaries and tax benefits are very attractive. Those who would like to escape the cold Canadian winters have the opportunity to work and travel during the winter months on "travel assignments" throughout the United States, primarily organized through Arizona based companies.

Since it's humble beginnings in 1964, Respiratory Therapy consistently make the top ten list of best occupations based on workplace surveys. The employment outlook is excellent as the profession continues to grow and expand in traditional and new areas of health care.