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**Inquiry:** Our hospital has a developed series of respiratory care protocols formed through collaboration with physicians, nurses and respiratory care practitioners and approved by the medical director, the hospital medical staff and hospital administration. The policy for the protocols would permit the RCP to initiate therapy upon receipt of any physician's order for Respiratory Care; to evaluate and treat, any inhaled / aerosolized medication prescription and/or any order for secretion clearance or chest physiotherapy. The order does not have to state specifically that the protocols should be initiated; that is the protocols are initiated by default, based on an initial order for respiratory care. The therapy provided to the patient is determined according to protocol as guided by specific clinical assessment and medical history indications. Is this policy consistent with the Respiratory Care Practice Act? The relevant sections of the policy are attached below:

#### Protocols Defined

The Therapist Driven Protocols (TDP's) are decision tree flow diagrams which serve as guidelines for Respiratory Care Practitioners to initiate, modify and discontinue respiratory therapy treatment modalities. When approved by the medical staff and hospital governing body, the TDP's provide Respiratory Care Practitioners with the authorization to perform these procedures.

#### Policy

1. Therapist Driven Protocols will be initiated by Respiratory Care Practitioners (RCP's) upon receipt of any physician order for Respiratory Care for:  
Evaluate and treat order  
    Any aerosolized / inhaled medication prescription  
    Any order for a secretion clearance or chest physiotherapy modality
2. Protocol implementation will be driven by clinical indications obtained by the RCP from chart review and physical assessment. The physician's order for respiratory care does not need to state specifically that the Protocols should be started.
3. Any patient's participation in the TDP's may be discontinued by a physician writing an order to "Discontinue or Cancel Therapist Driven

Protocols." Under these circumstances the physician will prescribe the respiratory care. Under current policy, these orders will expire in 72 hours.

**Response:** Section 3702 of the Respiratory Care Practice Act directly speaks to the use of protocols or therapist driven protocols to enhance the effectiveness of therapy. Section (e) of this section defines the question you are asking regarding the fact that your policy or protocol is enacted whenever an order to initiate respiratory care is seen by your staff.

It states that:

“Respiratory care protocols’ as used in this section means policies and protocols developed by a licensed health facility through collaboration, when appropriate with administrators, physicians and surgeons, registered nurses, physical therapists respiratory care practitioners, and other licensed health care practitioners.”

Based upon this information it is concluded that your policy and protocol are consistent with the Respiratory Care Practice Act. In fact, I would commend you and your staff for making the effort to improve the care delivered to your patients through collaboration with your medical director, medical staff and hospital administration. This effort speaks highly to your commitment to provide quality patient care in the community you serve

Reference # 2004-C-09