

Agenda Item 9 Commission on Accreditation for Respiratory Care Changes INFORMATION



COMMISSION ON ACCREDITATION FOR
RESPIRATORY CARE

INTRODUCTION

The CoARC and its collaborating organizations wish to establish, maintain, and advance educational standards constitute the minimum requirements to which an accredited advanced practice respiratory care program is held accountable and provide the basis on which the CoARC will confer or deny program accreditation. These Standards are used for the development, self-analysis and external evaluation of advanced practice respiratory care programs.

Historically, for respiratory therapists who have obtained a baccalaureate, a number of universities offer master's degrees in education or administration; obviously such programs do not include a clinical component. More recently, however, two types of respiratory therapy graduate education in the U.S. are emerging.

- 1) **Entry into Respiratory Care Professional Practice Master's Degree Program:** A program that offers individuals who have baccalaureate degrees in disciplines other than respiratory therapy the opportunity to enroll in a respiratory care program offering graduate credit and thereby enter practice with a master's degree in Respiratory Care. In addition to providing students with the clinical skills needed to function as respiratory therapists, these programs include course work in the areas of management, education, research, or advanced clinical practice (which may include an area of clinical specialization).
- 2) **Post-Professional Master's Degree Program:** A program that offers registered respiratory therapists with baccalaureate degrees the opportunity to enroll in a graduate program of study that prepares them for advanced practice in the respiratory therapy profession. Graduates of such programs would have skills in education, research, management and/or advanced clinical practice.

Background

The definition of the term "advanced practice" in respiratory therapy has evolved over time. For many years, the National Board for Respiratory Care (NBRC) has defined advanced practice therapists as those who have earned the Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT) credential in contrast to having earned the entry level Certified Respiratory Therapist credential (CRT). The CoARC accredits respiratory therapy education programs and determined that as of 2012 all accredited programs must prepare students at the advanced (RRT) credential level.

In 2002, the AARC, the NBRC, and CoARC issued statements in support of making education and credentialing beyond the level of the RRT available to respiratory therapists – a redefinition of the 'Advanced Practice' concept. Over the last decade, both respiratory therapy and physician leaders have increasingly expressed the need for such advanced practice respiratory therapists (APRTs) to support the management of and facilitate patient care as physician extenders. Under the leadership of a supervising physician, the APRT would be trained to assess patients, develop care plans, order and provide this care and evaluate and



COMMISSION ON ACCREDITATION FOR RESPIRATORY CARE

modify care based on each patient's response to therapy. This would require the development of advanced practice educational programs designed to:

- Prepare clinical practitioners with advanced knowledge and skills in basic and clinical sciences who are able to assess patients and to plan and deliver high quality, cost-effective health care;
- Develop advanced practice clinical specialists in the areas of adult critical care, pediatric critical care, neonatal critical care, pulmonary function technology and cardiopulmonary diagnostics, polysomnography, and other clinical areas;
- Prepare individuals for research both in the laboratory and in clinical practice.

Primary Role of the Advanced Practice Respiratory Therapist

Under the leadership of a physician, the APRT is expected to:

- Serve as a physician extender in both pulmonary medicine and critical care;
- Provide access to cost effective, quality care by:
 - Facilitating implementation of clinical respiratory treatment protocols
 - Facilitating management and weaning of patients from mechanical ventilation
 - Improving appropriateness and efficiency of respiratory care
- Ensure delivery of 'best practice' respiratory care which will:
 - Improve patient clinical outcomes
 - Improve patient safety
 - Optimize allocation of respiratory care
 - Reduce length of stay and hospital readmission

Description of the Advanced Practice Respiratory Therapist

The Advanced Practice Respiratory Therapist (APRT) is a credentialed, licensed respiratory care practitioner trained to provide a scope of practice that exceeds that of the registered respiratory therapist. After obtaining the NBRC RRT credential, the aspiring APRT must successfully complete a CoARC-accredited graduate level education and training program that enables the APRT to provide advanced, evidence-based, diagnostic and therapeutic clinical practice and disease management.

As part of a physician-led team, APRTs are trained to provide diagnostic, therapeutic, critical care and preventive care services in multiple settings across the health care spectrum including acute (emergency department [ED] or urgent care) and critical care, sub-acute, in-patient and preventative care, as well as chronic care, ambulatory, and out-patient care. They take medical histories and record progress notes; examine, treat, and counsel patients; order and interpret laboratory tests, imaging studies, and diagnostics; and provide acute, critical, and chronic care to patients. The value and importance of maintaining the physician-therapist relationship that has benefitted patients with cardiopulmonary disease for many decades is preserved by having APRTs practice under the leadership of a physician.



COMMISSION ON ACCREDITATION FOR RESPIRATORY CARE

Eligibility

The CoARC accredits degree-granting programs in respiratory care that have undergone a rigorous process of voluntary peer review and have met or exceeded the minimum accreditation Standards set by the CoARC. The CoARC accredits only respiratory care programs offered by, or located within institutions chartered by and physically located within, the United States and its territories and where students are geographically located within the United States and its territories for their education.

To become accredited by the CoARC, the sponsor of an APRT program must be: a U.S. accredited postsecondary institution; or a consortium of which one member must be a U.S. accredited postsecondary institution; or in facilities sponsored by the U.S. military (as defined in Standard A1).

Sponsors must apply for program accreditation as outlined in CoARC's Accreditation Policies and Procedures Manual available at www.coarc.com. Programs focused on advanced clinical education are eligible for accreditation. Eligible programs must comply with CoARC's Accreditation Policies and Procedures and use the application forms provided by the CoARC.

All APRT students must be graduates of a CoARC-accredited Entry into Respiratory Care Professional Practice degree program and hold the Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT) credential prior to entry into the program.

PROGRAM REVIEW

Accreditation of APRT programs is a voluntary process that requires a comprehensive review of the program relative to these Standards. While the process is voluntary, it provides programs with external validation of their educational offering. Additionally the process offers prospective APRT students one means by which they can judge the quality of the educational experience offered by the program.

Accreditation decisions are based on the CoARC's assessment of the information contained in the accreditation application and self-study report, the report of site visit evaluation teams and the annual Report of Current Status, as well as its review of any reports or documents submitted by the program during each accreditation cycle. To clarify submitted information, additional data may be requested at any time during the review process.

FORMAT OF STANDARDS

The Standards are divided into five sections: **(A) Program Administration and Sponsorship; (B) Institutional and Personnel Resources; (C) Program Goals, Outcomes, and Assessment; (D) Curriculum; and (E) Fair Practices and Recordkeeping.** Within each section,



COMMISSION ON ACCREDITATION FOR
RESPIRATORY CARE

specific Standards elucidate the CoARC's requirements for accreditation.

Following each Standard, there are items of evidence the program must supply to demonstrate compliance with the Standard. The evidence list is included to facilitate program response to progress reports and accreditation actions by the CoARC, to help programs develop self-study reports and, prepare for on-site visits, and to support review of the program by the on-site team and the Commission. These items are the minimum information necessary to determine compliance and each item must be addressed. Additional information that the program believes supports compliance may also be provided.

Where appropriate, the CoARC has added *Interpretive Guidelines* that explain the rationale, meaning and significance of a Standard both for those responsible for educational programs and for those who evaluate these programs for the CoARC. These statements are not exclusive or exhaustive; they simply clarify the operational meaning of the Standards to which they refer and may be changed over time to reflect evolving educational or clinical practices. Expanded guidance in the form of examples to assist programs in better understanding and interpreting the "must" statements within the Standards are included. The CoARC will periodically review and revise the *Interpretive Guidelines* based on questions and comments it receives regarding their clarity and usefulness.

It is the responsibility of the program to demonstrate its compliance with all components of each of the Standards. If one component of a Standard is not in compliance, the entire Standard will be cited. In some cases the CoARC is very prescriptive about what it needs to review to assess compliance, i.e., specific materials as listed in the application, appendices and required materials for review during a site visit, with the role of site visitors being to verify, validate, and clarify this information. However, the CoARC is not directive regarding many process issues, allowing programs and institutions to develop those that best suit their programs. Examples of process issues include: the number of credits or hours assigned; format for curriculum and course formats (i.e., traditional vs. problem-based); and curriculum delivery methods. It is the program's responsibility to address these as specified in the Standards; the CoARC reserves the right to request clarification of process issues that may impact accreditation.