

A Position Statement on Baccalaureate and Graduate Respiratory Care Education in North Carolina

There are about 112,000 respiratory care professionals in the United States, and 4,300 in North Carolina. They work with patients of all ages and in many different care settings. In North Carolina, Respiratory Care Professionals are nationally credentialed and state licensed members of the health care team that provide respiratory care services for patients with heart and lung disorders. Most respiratory therapists (RT's) and respiratory care practitioners (RCP's), work in hospitals where they perform intensive care procedures in the adult, pediatric and neonatal critical care units. They are typically a vital part of the hospital's lifesaving response team that handles patient emergencies. Of the more than 7,000 hospitals in this country, about 5,700 have separate respiratory care departments.

In a statement released by the agencies representing the profession of Respiratory Care (American Association for Respiratory Care), program accreditation (Commission on Accreditation for Respiratory Care), and professional credentialing (National Board for Respiratory Care), the continued growth and advancement of the profession requires that every respiratory care professional demonstrate an advanced level of critical thinking, assessment, and problem solving skills. Increased educational standards are essential in today's health care environment; not only to improve the quality of care, but also to reduce inappropriate care and thereby reduce costs. Respiratory Care Professionals are expected to participate in the development, modification and evaluation of care plans, protocol administration, disease management, and patient education. As a result of this need, the AARC developed a white paper supporting the need for advanced training at baccalaureate and graduate degree levels.

Despite this need to develop the advanced qualities and skills needed for the respiratory care professionals there is presently only one respiratory care baccalaureate degree program offered in North Carolina. Although the associate degree programs are the foundation for the profession, and they do an outstanding job in providing the majority of the needed human resources for the field; there is an increasing need in the number of practitioners with advanced credentials and education in order to take on leadership roles within the profession. Such roles include research, education, management, as well as advanced practice skills. North Carolina respiratory care professionals often enroll in distance learning programs outside of North Carolina to obtain the advanced training needed for these skills.

Therefore in cooperation with the AARC, NBRC, CoARC and the Coalition for Baccalaureate and Graduate Respiratory Therapy Education (CoBGRTE), we; the North Carolina Association of Respiratory Educators (NCARE), the North Carolina Respiratory Care Board (NCRCB) and the North Carolina Society for Respiratory Care (NCSRC) support the advancement of respiratory care in North Carolina by endorsing the development of baccalaureate level education in respiratory care, and to encourage respiratory care professionals to pursue advanced levels of education. The completion program suggested by NCARE would meet the needs of our flourishing profession, without duplication of excellent resources and expenses.

As a collective group, we are devoted to our professional growth and development through higher levels of education in order to improve the most important aspect of our profession - the patient.