What is a respiratory therapist?

Respiratory therapists are health care specialists who evaluate, treat and care for patients with breathing disorders and help provide the very breath of life for many patients. Therapists work under the direction of a physician and assist in the diagnosis, treatment and care management of patients with pulmonary disorders.

Respiratory therapists operate high-tech equipment. They treat patients ranging in age from newborns to senior citizens, working with medical gases, medication, aerosols, ventilator management, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and airway management to help patients feel better and breathe easier.

Who makes a good respiratory therapist? Someone who is energetic and engaged with patients. Someone who can think on their feet and make decisions quickly when needed, and who likes the challenge of problem solving to improve patient care. A good respiratory therapist is compassionate about others and passionate about learning and staying current with technology and medical advances.

Employment Opportunities

Well-trained respiratory therapists are in demand in areas including acute care hospitals, durable medical equipment companies, sub-acute facilities, home care agencies, physician's offices, or managed care organizations; as well as specialized areas, such as sleep labs and pulmonary function labs.

The U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts employment of respiratory therapists to grow by 23 percent from 2016 to 2026, much faster than the average for all occupations. The increasing demand will come from substantial growth in the middle-aged and elderly population, a development that will heighten the incidence of cardiopulmonary disease. Growth in demand also will result from the expanding role of therapists in case management, disease prevention, emergency care, and the early detection of pulmonary disorders. The median annual wage for respiratory therapists is $65,322 in 2018.
Career Talk

Students who are considering enrolling in the Respiratory Care program at Greenville Technical College are required to complete the online Career Talk prior to admittance in order to get a clear understanding of what is involved in becoming a GTC Respiratory Care student. We recommend that you complete the online Career Talk session as soon as you are admitted to the college in order to determine if you will be able to comply. The link to the online career talk is available on www.gvltec.edu/respiratorycare.