



CANADIAN SOCIETY OF RESPIRATORY THERAPISTS

SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DES THÉRAPEUTES RESPIRATOIRES

CSRT Position Statement on Baccalaureate Degree as Entry-to-Practice

Position

As the national professional association for respiratory therapists in Canada and the credentialing body for respiratory therapists in non-regulated Canadian jurisdictions, the Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists (CSRT) believes that respiratory therapists must have the necessary knowledge, skills and professional judgment to provide safe and effective patient care. Paramount to achieving this aim is ensuring that respiratory therapists are scholarly practitioners who are equipped to provide patients with care that is based on the best available evidence, while drawing from their clinical expertise and integrating the preferences of patients and families. Implementation of a baccalaureate degree level of education as entry-to-practice for respiratory therapists in Canada is a central step in achieving this aim.

The Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists (CSRT) supports the position that a professional baccalaureate degree in the discipline of respiratory therapy be held as the minimum entry-to-practice requirement for respiratory therapists (RTs) in Canada.

Policy Recommendation

Canada's complex health care environments are rapidly evolving in response to such factors as advances in research, the evolution of technology and medical therapies, and the changing health care needs of Canadians. These environments challenge respiratory therapists to respond and practice in a scholarly and evidence-informed manner.

As scholarly practitioners, health care professionals are expected to demonstrate a lifelong commitment to excellence in practice through continuous learning, engagement in evidence-informed decision-making, and by contributing to scholarship and knowledge translation (KT).¹ To that end, respiratory therapists must adopt and demonstrate the characteristics of a scholar. The competencies associated with scholarly practice are not sufficiently engendered in respiratory therapists through the current minimum entry to practice standard of diploma-level education in Canada as outlined in the National Competency Framework for the Profession of Respiratory Therapy (2016-2021), Part 1: National Standards for Entry to Practice.

The CSRT contends that achievement of a baccalaureate degree level of education is essential to meet the competency requirements associated with scholarly practice. The CSRT calls on provincial and federal health and education stakeholders to take constructive action towards achieving this goal.

Benefits of a scholarly practice in the health professions

Research across the health care professions has shown that scholarly practice has benefits for the individual clinician (e.g. validates both the health care providers work and their profession as a whole)², the organization (e.g. reduction in staff turnover and increased productivity and efficiency)^{3,4} and most importantly, patients in the health care system (e.g. lower rate of mortality and adverse events).⁵ Furthermore, there exists a body of literature describing the relationship between the level of higher education (degree versus diploma) attained by health professionals and achievement of outcomes relative to priority areas in health care.⁶ The following discussion introduces key elements of the literature available.

Benefits of a baccalaureate degree for entry-to-practice in respiratory therapy

Impacts on professional skills development:

Studies have found that nurses prepared at the baccalaureate level have stronger communication and problem solving skills⁷ and a higher proficiency in their ability to make nursing diagnoses and to evaluate nursing interventions.⁸ Similar associations are suggested in the respiratory therapy literature, including that professional degree educated RTs demonstrate higher level of critical thinking skills compared to those with a diploma.^{9,10,11} These professional skills encompass those that are well known to underlie and support achievement relative to a number of quality indicators.

Impacts on the health care system:

A substantial number of publications address how levels of education may relate to health system performance and accountability. There is an appetite for employing degree-prepared health professionals in the health care system. The perspectives of organisations and employers are well articulated- they prefer to hire both respiratory therapists and other health professionals who have degrees.^{12,13} Additionally, there is empiric evidence to support that employing degree prepared health professionals makes a positive system wide impact.¹⁴

Impacts on patient outcomes:

The cornerstone of the literature describing the relationship between level of education and patient outcomes is with respect to nursing education and patient mortality rates. Since 2003, a substantial body of literature has quantified how strongly the percentage of RNs in a hospital with baccalaureate degrees relates to decreases patient mortality (primarily measured by in-hospital 30-day mortality, failure to rescue). For example, it has been demonstrated that for each 10% increase in the proportion of nurses with BSN or higher degrees decreased the risk of mortality and of failure to rescue by 5%.¹⁵ Initially studied in US contexts, these associations have now also been demonstrated in Canada, Europe, and Asia.

Impacts on patient safety:

Arguably, the notion of the impact of education level on mortality and failure to rescue relate closely to patient safety. This theme has been separated from these two often cited concepts in order to highlight the limited yet important literature that relates to other aspects of patient safety. An emerging body of knowledge is making important connection between the level of education and rates of adverse events, but also to organizational cultures which supports reporting of adverse events.¹⁶

About the Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists (CSRT)

The CSRT is the national professional association representing respiratory therapists across Canada. The CSRT promotes the respiratory therapy profession at the national and international level, and is the credentialing agency for respiratory therapists who practice in non-regulated jurisdictions in Canada.

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