

## **TITLE: A STATE-WIDE SURVEY OF RESPIRATORY THERAPIST SUPPORT FOR BACCALAUREATE ENTRY-LEVEL EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS**

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**Background:** In order to qualify for proposed changes to the Medicare part “B” program, the RT must have the “registered” credential and hold a bachelor’s degree, similar to other health professions recognized by the federal government.<sup>1</sup> In order to expand services, assure competency, and adopt new roles such as Disease Manager; The American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC) has recommended increasing entry-level educational standards for Respiratory Therapists in the future.<sup>2</sup> Because of potential licensure changes needed to coincide with increased educational requirements, the North Carolina Respiratory Care Board (NCRCB) conducted a state-wide survey of licensed Respiratory Care practitioners to determine staff therapist support for future increases in educational standards. The purpose of this survey was to quantify practitioner support for increasing educational standards in the future.

**Methods:** A voluntary, anonymous, electronic survey was developed and sent state-wide to 4,526 active, licensed Respiratory Therapists in North Carolina. The survey focused on the current and projected job description requirements, salary changes, organizational recognition for obtaining an advanced degree, and organizational support such as scholarships and tuition reimbursement, promotion options for increased education, and staff support for the baccalaureate degree as entry level to the profession.

**Results:** A total of 968 (n= 968) licensed Respiratory Care practitioners completed the survey, for a state-wide 21 % response rate. Reported responses are summarized in the table below , which follows this abstract. Key findings included:

- (1) Good practitioner support ( n = 754, 78%) for increasing the number of baccalaureate programs in the state.
- (2) A significant percentage ( n = 563, 58%) of hospitals/foundations providing available scholarships/organizational grants for continuing education by Respiratory Therapists,
- (3) Some degree ( n = 203, 21%) of clinical ladder implementation at present to provide incentives for advanced degree completion,
- (4) No expected increase in salary ( n = 821, 85%) for staff who complete an advanced degree.
- (5) Some projected ability ( n = 467, 48%) for departments to expand services when staff obtain an advanced degree.
- (6) Current AAS staff who would consider enrolling in a baccalaureate degree program ( n = 532, 55%) .

**Conclusions:** This study has identified significant Respiratory Care practitioner support for increasing the number of baccalaureate educational programs in the state. The study also identified very good support (78%) for increased entry-level educational standards for Respiratory Therapists in the future. Although some institutional resources exist to support current staff continuing their education, this study has also

identified the need to pursue clinical ladder implementation as an incentive for existing staff to further their education; since salary increases were not projected when staff obtain an advanced degree.

**PRESENTATION TYPE:** Original study

**State-Wide Survey of Respiratory Care Practitioner Support for Increasing Future Respiratory Therapist Educational Standards**

<b>Survey Question</b>	<b>Statewide Frequency Reported</b>	<b>Percentage of Responses</b>
<b>Would you value additional Bachelor degree programs in North Carolina? (Answer of "Yes")</b>	n = 754	78%
<b>Do you feel it is very or somewhat important to increase educational requirements for Respiratory Care profession in the future? (Answer of "Yes")</b>	n = 754	78%
<b>Does your hospital, organization, or foundation provide educational assistance/scholarships to Respiratory Therapists (Answer of "Yes")</b>	n = 563	58 %
<b>At present, does your department have a clinical ladder in place which recognizes and rewards an advanced degree (Answer of "Yes")</b>	n = 203	21 %
<b>At present, does your hospital provide an increase in salary for Respiratory Therapists who obtain an advanced educational degree (Answer of "Yes")</b>	n = 147	15%
<b>Would consider enrolling in a baccalaureate program</b>	n = 532	55 %
<b>Could your department expand its services by implementing higher educational standards? (Answer of "Yes")</b>	n = 467	48 %

1. AARC. In the News - Medicare Respiratory Therapy Initiative Frequently Asked Questions. *American Association of Respiratory Care*. Available at: <https://www.aarc.org/headlines/09/02/faq.cfm>.

2. American Association for Respiratory Care. Development of Baccalaureate and Graduate Degrees in Respiratory Care: A White Paper from the AARC Steering Committee of the Coalition for Baccalaureate and Graduate Respiratory Therapy Education. AARC Website: [www.AARC.org](http://www.AARC.org).