

Respiratory Therapy

HELPING OTHERS TO BREATHE



Respiratory care focusing on children



Meet Anne Bollman, a Pediatric/Neonatal Respiratory Therapist at WakeMed.

Anne specializes in working with children, caring for the sickest, smallest patients in WakeMed's Pediatric Unit and Level III Intensive Care Nursery. She's part of the team that helps care for newborns just after delivery helping them to breathe at a time that is very critical to their survival. Some of her

tinest patients are delivered at 24 weeks and only weigh one pound. Specialized breathing tubes and equipment provide life-saving treatment and therapy, along with Anne's loving touch.

She knew as a teenager that she wanted to go into a health career. At first, she wanted to be a nurse, but the wait at the time was three years to get into nursing school. She also watched her mother die of emphysema and saw the difference respiratory therapy had made during her care. She also witnessed the birth of a cousin who was born prematurely at WakeMed and was given life-sustaining respiratory care. These two experiences helped lead her toward her career to help children and help those with lung problems.

"Premature infants are often so critically ill. As a respiratory therapist and part of that critical care team, we work hard to make the difference in them surviving. Many times they come back to visit us, or parents send pictures, and you see that they're OK. That's the most rewarding part of my job...that these babies normally get better and you get to see them as happy, healthy children."

Interested?

To find out more about Respiratory Therapy, visit these web sites or contact these resources:

- www.aarc.org - American Association for Respiratory Care
- www.nbr.org - National Board for Respiratory Care, Inc.
- www.ncrcb.org - North Carolina Respiratory Care Board
- www.stats.bls.gov/oco/ocos084.htm - US Department of Labor - Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Handbook

Accredited Programs in North Carolina

- www.durhamtech.org - Durham Technical Community College
- www.edgecombe.cc.nc.us - Edgecombe Community College
- www.faytech.cc.nc.us - Fayetteville Technical Community College
- www.pcc.pitt.cc.nc.us - Pitt Community College
- www.sandhills.cc.nc.us - Sandhills Community College

For more information about the profession or program at WakeMed, contact Caren Meyers, Director of Respiratory Therapy at 919-350-8977 or cmeyers@wakemed.org.

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While most of us don't think about each breath we take, for thousands, each breath is a challenge. Chronic disease and illness have disabled their lungs. But thanks to advances in the field of respiratory care, these people are getting the treatment they need to live fuller, more active lives.

A career in respiratory therapy allows you to help those suffering from breathing problems. It's one of the fastest growing fields in health care and offers new and exciting opportunities for those interested in making a difference each day in someone's health.

"When a patient can't breathe, it's so rewarding to see the immediate relief that they get from the care we can provide through respiratory therapy," explained Caren Meyers, director of respiratory care at WakeMed.

The expanding role of respiratory therapy

Currently, there are about 110,000 respiratory therapists in the United States, with most of them working in an acute care hospital setting like WakeMed. They are critical staff members in intensive care units, emergency departments and specialized nursing units where patients need and benefit from breathing treatments. Of the more than 7,000 hospitals in the US, nearly 5,700 have dedicated respiratory therapy departments, making this field one of the most important links in hospital care.

Therapists work with patients of all ages - from premature infants to the elderly. Patients include those with chronic lung problems with conditions such as asthma, emphysema, bronchitis, premature lung development and those who have had heart attacks, an accident or traumatic injury and children and adults living with cystic fibrosis, certain types of cancer, especially lung cancer and AIDS.

Respiratory therapists work with each patient on an individual basis to assess their breathing needs - from evaluation to treatment and care, under the direction of the patient's physician.

- Respiratory therapists work to help with diagnosis by:**
- Taking blood samples and analyzing them to determine oxygen, carbon dioxide and other gas levels in patients. This is one of the first steps in helping to guide the treatment course with a patient.
 - Gathering sputum and breath samples to further diagnose and help establish treatment.
 - Measuring the peak flow (how fast patients can get the volume of gas out - such as for asthma patients)
 - Administering pulmonary function tests
- They offer treatment:**
- Under the physician's direction and as a part of the team, determining the best course of treatment for each patient through thorough analysis and evaluation of the patient's total health condition
 - By operating various pieces of equipment to assist with breathing or to provide oxygen to the patient
 - Through setting up and maintaining life-saving ventilators for patients who cannot breathe on their own
 - In giving inhaled medications that help improve breathing
 - By inserting and maintaining artificial airways for patients who cannot breathe by any other means
 - By providing information on smoking cessation

Career options are diverse

There are two career paths in respiratory therapy. A new graduate entering a career in a hospital setting like WakeMed will begin as a Certified Respiratory Therapist (CRT). You have to have a two-year associate's degree or four-year baccalaureate degree in respiratory therapy to qualify for a career in RT. Also, once you graduate, you will need to pass the national examination through the National Board of Respiratory Care (which will also qualify you for a North Carolina license) that leads to credentialing you as a CRT.

The education doesn't stop after you begin work. Respiratory therapists are required to take continuing education courses to maintain their license. If you're employed at WakeMed, it's easy. Most of the classes are offered through the Nursing Education Department.

It's part of the commitment to continuing education throughout the health care system.

To further your career, you can continue while on the job to prepare for more extensive examinations that will advance your career to a Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT). At WakeMed, CRTs must advance to RRTs after one year of employment.

Also, while you are enrolled in college, WakeMed hires third semester students to work as respiratory care assistants. This gives you invaluable skills to work directly with patients, under the supervision of some of the most experienced professionals in the field. While students cannot work in critical care areas, they are involved in all other levels of care. All students, following graduation, are eligible for part-time or full-time employment. At WakeMed, respiratory assistants, after receiving their CRT, must advance to RRT within their first year after graduation.

WakeMed offers positions for CRTs and RRTs. Tuition reimbursement programs and training help you further your career options. Both offer job security, pay above average for most comparable jobs. RTs are needed throughout the country in both rural and metropolitan settings.

Care for all stages of life

At WakeMed, you will be part of a team of 72 therapists who specialize either in adult or pediatric respiratory care. Each year, respiratory therapists evaluate and help treat thousands of patients in all areas of the hospital, except the operating room. Last year therapists administered 103,969 breathing treatments to patients. That's not counting other services that they provide on a daily basis. It's a fast-paced, high-energy job that offers diversity. One minute you may be administering a breathing treatment to a chronic lung disease patient and the next responding to a "code blue" where you have to open an emergency airway for a patient to breathe.

Respiratory therapists are also a valuable part of the trauma team, which cares for patients at Wake County's only state designated level II Trauma Center. WakeMed offers the highest level of critical/intensive care in the county with eight intensive care units, offering respiratory therapists the opportunity to work in an advanced care setting.

Beyond the Trauma Center, there are specialized opportunities for working with critically ill patients in the six adult intensive care units, pediatric intensive care unit or with premature babies in the Neonatal Intensive Care Nurseries. WakeMed is the only hospital in the county offering level III intensive care for babies in Raleigh and a level II intensive care unit in Cary, providing respiratory therapists with a rewarding career opportunities.

Besides the excellent salary and location options, respiratory care is a vital and well-respected part of health care. Hours are normally flexible, especially in a hospital setting like WakeMed, where it's a 24/7, 365 day a year operation. If you only want a part-time job, WakeMed offers limited hours, along with casual and supplemental position (different shifts if needed) to meet your family or personal needs. And respiratory care is one of those careers that when you go home each day, you know that you've helped improve someone's quality of life. There's nothing more fulfilling than seeing someone regain their ability to breathe.

Lifelong job security

Currently, there are more than 110,000 Respiratory Therapists in the US and the outlook for employment is strong through 2010. As with many health careers, the number of graduating respiratory therapists is not expected to keep up with the number of job openings. Growing middle-age and older populations will result in more cardiopulmonary disease. And, in general, older adults suffer from more respiratory illnesses, such as pneumonia, chronic bronchitis, emphysema and heart disease. Also, premature infants who are dependent on ventilators at birth will also increase demand for respiratory therapists.

What are your options?

To be a respiratory therapist, you need to enjoy working with a variety of ages and people who have many different medical conditions that impact the lungs. It helps to have a strong interest in technology and enjoy the technical aspects of the job. Details, especially in measuring medication dosages and administering oxygen, are extremely important. Plus, as with others on the health care team, your actions involve life-saving decisions.

Besides working in a hospital setting, there are other options available:

- Physician offices
- Home care agencies
- Skilled nursing facilities
- Government agencies

High school is your first step

High school students should take courses in biology, math (algebra I and II and geometry), chemistry, physics and other college-preparatory classes as required by your school of choice. It's best to check with several colleges to determine if there are additional requirements.

A salary above the norm

The average annual starting salary for a respiratory therapist (CRT) at WakeMed is \$24,700 to \$32,150. For RRTs, the salary range is \$33,400 to \$43,500. You can expect salaries to remain competitive since there is a high demand for respiratory therapists across the country.



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