Steps to Becoming a Respiratory Therapist

**Step 1: Complete Your Degree in Respiratory Care**

Professor Bill Galvin helps respiratory care students gain practical experience. To provide the best career opportunities, you should consider successfully completing the coursework required in a bachelor’s degree program in respiratory care. The bachelor’s degree curriculum generally includes coursework in clinical respiratory care, procedures, pharmacology, pathophysiology, mechanical ventilation and advanced respiratory theory.

Many programs require a competency assessment that demonstrates the attainment of skills and characteristics required for success in the respiratory care field. In addition, you will be required to complete clinical hours to acquire practical experience in this important medical field.

Selecting a university program that has been accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Respiratory Care will ensure the widest range of opportunities for you once you’ve earned your degree. After graduation, respiratory therapists are qualified to work as bedside clinicians, patient educators and advocates, pulmonary rehabilitation specialists, neonatal/pediatric/adult critical care specialists and in management positions in hospitals and alternative care sites.

Keep in mind that continuing education is often required to ensure the ongoing competency and quality of care for patients seeking treatment for breathing issues in the medical environment.
Step 2: Pass the Credentialing Examinations
Becoming a Certified Respiratory Therapist is usually the next step on your journey. The National Board for Respiratory Care (NBRC) is responsible for administering the examination required to achieve this certification. This multiple-choice test measures your general knowledge and offers pathways to entry-level and advanced-level credentialing:

- You will first take the NBRC Therapist Multiple Choice Examination, and upon passing at the lower cut score level, will be awarded the entry-level Certified Respiratory Therapist (CRT) credential.
- Passing the Multiple Choice Examination at the upper cut score level will allow you to sit the Clinical Simulation Examination.
- After successfully passing the Clinical Simulation Examination, you will be awarded the Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT) credential, which is the highest level credential of professional practice in this field.

While each of the above credentials can be used to demonstrate eligibility for licensure, the Registered Respiratory Therapist credential is clearly required for higher-level positions in the medical field.

Step 3: Apply for and Obtain a State License
Every state in the U.S. except for Alaska requires licensure for respiratory care practitioners. Students must have completed at least an associate degree to qualify for licensure in these 49 states. Most states require background checks for licensure applicants; some also offer trainee licenses for students in an accredited respiratory care program.

How Long Does It Take to Become a Respiratory Therapist?
Becoming a respiratory therapist takes at least two years of study. However, many employers favor candidates who have a bachelor’s degree in the field.

Hands-on clinical experience is also required to become a licensed respiratory therapist. After completing all respiratory therapist education requirements, including laboratory, simulation and clinical experiences in the hospitals, aspiring therapists must also pass a credentialing examination and acquire a license to practice in their home state.

So just how long does it take to be a respiratory therapist? The entire process may take up to four years from start to finish, including earning your Bachelor of Health Science in Respiratory Care degree and becoming licensed.
What Does a Respiratory Therapist Do?

Becoming a respiratory therapist provides opportunities to make a positive difference in the lives of those with breathing problems and enjoy the benefits of an in-demand career in the medical field. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as a respiratory therapist you will provide a number of services for patients with breathing difficulties, including the following:

- Measure lung capacity to determine a patient’s condition
- Educate patients about their conditions and the proper use of therapeutic equipment
- Provide basic treatments for diseases such as asthma, emphysema and COPD
- Take notes and keep records of patients’ treatments and prognoses
- Serve as a member of the Code Team in performing basic and advanced cardiopulmonary resuscitation
- Initiate mechanical ventilation and maintain life support
- Assist doctors in creating and monitoring treatment plans

Respiratory therapy is a rewarding career, but you also need to understand that it is fast-paced, physically enduring, and often requires you to carry a beeper and respond to emergencies in the emergency department, ventilator alarms in the intensive care unit, or codes throughout the hospital.

GMercyU, Your Pathway to Success

To become a respiratory therapist and qualify for employment in this growing field, you’ll need to complete either an Associate degree in Respiratory Care or a Bachelor of Health Science in Respiratory Care, pass credentialing examinations, and obtain licensure in your state.

At the Frances M. Maguire School of Nursing and Health Professions at Gwynedd Mercy University, we offer pathways to success that can help you achieve your goals of becoming a respiratory therapist. In fact, our students have a 100% pass rate on the Certified Respiratory Therapist exam that is administered by the National Board for Respiratory Care, and GMercyU has been nationally recognized and honored for its performance on the advanced level RRT credentialing examination.

Our respiratory care programs provide you with the classroom, laboratory and clinical education you need to qualify for good-paying jobs in this field. You will be taught by an experienced, dedicated and accomplished faculty - published authors, seasoned presenters, and experts in cardiopulmonary physiology, disease management, mechanical ventilation and pulmonary diagnostics. Our faculty are professional leaders with more than 120 years of experience dedicated and committed to your professional growth and development.

Contact our Admissions office today at 800-342-5462 or send an email to admissions@gmercyu.edu to learn more about our associate and bachelor’s degree programs in the profession of respiratory care. We look forward to the chance to help you achieve your career goals.

Sources:
http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/respiratory-therapists.htm#tab-4
https://www.nbrc.org/crt/pages/default.aspx