

BULLETIN

## Respiratory therapy: career choice proves rewarding

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### Penticton Herald (Daily)

Editor's note: October 24-30 was officially designated as Respiratory Therapy Week. Kevin Abney, a member of the respiratory therapy department at Penticton Regional Hospital, presents this first-hand look at his career choice.

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During Respiratory Therapy Week, I found myself looking back at where it all started for me and how a few youthful teenage choices resulted in a career I am truly happy in.

High school was flying by quickly and "Career Day" had all the typical career choices - policeman, nurse, teacher etc. I was leaning towards something in the medical field because I wanted "to help people," but I didn't feel I was right for nursing and becoming a doctor meant too many years of school.

Then my mom asked me if respiratory therapy interested me. So I did what any teenager does - I jumped on YouTube, typed in "respiratory therapy" and watched the first video. I then went on Google to research which colleges provided training programs in respiratory therapy and how long it would take to complete the training.

Also, because I was passionate in playing volleyball, I checked out whether they had a volleyball team. Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops seemed a pretty good fit and since I had made up my mind to pursue respiratory therapy, I applied and was accepted.

I found the program material extremely interesting but felt like I was in overdrive trying to complete the course content. Students who successfully complete the first two years then undertake an 11-month practicum. I spent 4.5 months at Royal Columbian Hospital in New Westminster, 1.5 months at Children's Hospital, and five months at Royal Inland Hospital in Kamloops, and loved every minute of it.

A respiratory therapist is generally like being an "airway and breathing specialist" but that isn't truly what it's all about.

Respiratory therapists are there whenever someone is in a life-threatening situation.

Any person who is having issues breathing, experiencing trauma, and any life threatening emergency on the wards, will see an RT come running.

In the ABCs (Airway, Breathing, Circulation) of First Aid - respiratory therapists are the "A" and the "B".

There is the adrenaline portion of the job but there is also the thinking part. Operating ventilators is an RT role, as every decision will affect a patient's prognosis. As a patient improves or worsens, the RT uses a clinical

picture, vitals and chest x-rays to decide how to react and change the ventilation.

We do tests to measure arterial blood gases and use the results to measure subtle changes in a patient's condition and try and meet those changes.

As a patient improves, we need to use our expertise to help the patient to "wean off" the ventilator and transition to breathing without a machine.

Another part of the job is education and lung health. We do breathing tests to determine lung function and determine the appropriate medication someone should be using. We teach clients about their medication and the most safe and effective ways to use them.

Some RTs make home visits and check up on people who are using oxygen at home or have permanent breathing devices such as tracheostomies. Every shift you have to be ready to jump into action, work hand in hand with nurses, physicians and other healthcare workers, and be the "A" and the "B" of the ABCs of First Aid.

I am proud to be a member of a skilled and dynamic team and honoured to be part of a larger health care community at Penticton Regional Hospital.

During this past year, respiratory therapists in the hospital expanded their working hours to a 24-7 week, meaning that there is always a respiratory therapist on duty.

I couldn't be happier that I pursued a career as a respiratory therapist.

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