

# Respiratory Therapy Workforce in Maine

January 2024

## Executive Summary:

Respiratory Therapy is one of the most needed occupations in Maine hospitals. To investigate why and explore possible solutions, MHA joined Central Maine Healthcare, Maine Medical Center, Mount Desert Island Hospital, Kennebec Valley Community College and Southern Maine Community College to identify survey questions to better understand the underlying factors affecting the training, recruitment, and retention of respiratory therapists in Maine.

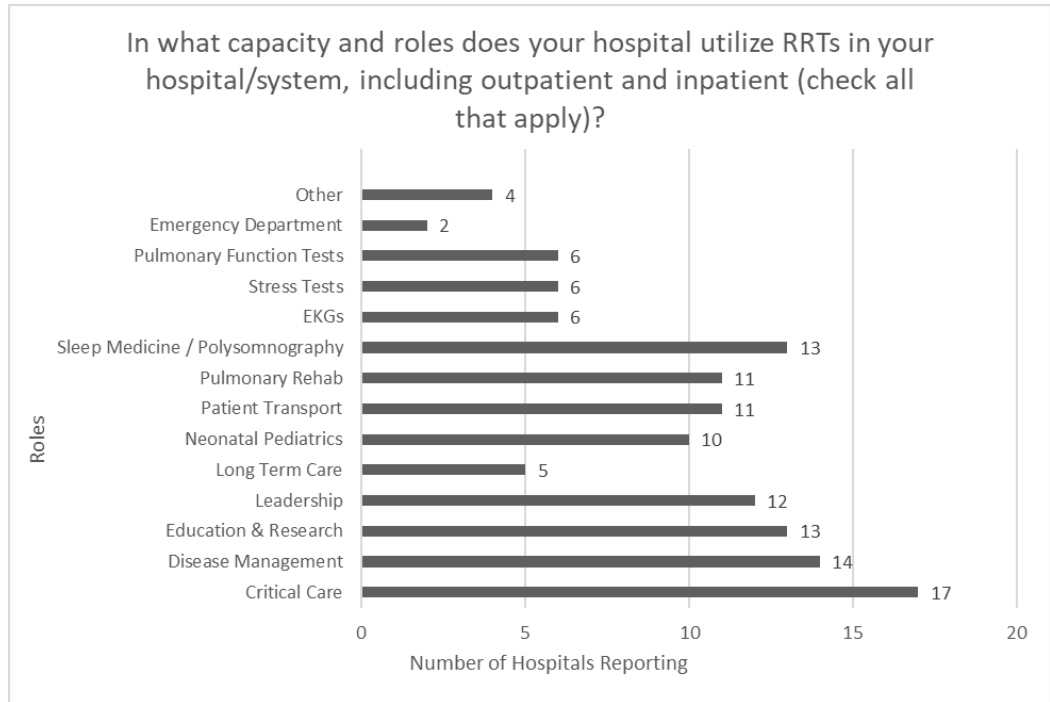
In the summer of 2023, MHA used that survey to query member hospitals and the two training programs in Maine. Respondents were asked about hiring practices, recruiting barriers, compensation, graduation rates, and training obstacles. The workgroup then reviewed the results, identified gaps and impediments and their root causes to recruiting and training respiratory therapists (RT) in Maine, and developed concrete action steps and strategies that could be employed to shift current and future workforce supply. The following summarizes the survey results, the identified obstacles and challenges, and those solutions for strengthening the respiratory therapy workforce.

## Problem:

Respiratory Therapy was identified as one of the top needed occupations in Maine hospitals based on a survey completed in May 2023. Respiratory Therapist vacancies have increased the reliance on travelers and have shifted work to other team members. Patient care and related services in the outpatient and inpatient settings are affected by vacancies, and hospitals' finances are negatively impacted by increased staffing costs for travelers.

- On average, it takes Maine hospitals **one to two years to hire one registered Respiratory Therapist.**
- **The registered Respiratory Therapist turnover rate is between 10-38%**, with an observed higher turnover rate among those with fewer years of experience.
- Maine hospitals anticipate that they will **need to hire at least 241 FTE Respiratory Therapists over the next 5 years** based on care delivery demands and retirements. This number does not include those needed in leadership or teaching positions, thus the actual number needed exceeds 250 FTE positions.
- At the time of survey, **Maine hospitals employed 44 FTE traveler/temporary workers to fill critical roles in their hospitals.**

- Respiratory Therapists work in a variety of roles throughout hospitals, further demonstrating their value to the care team:



- Compensation varies widely and is an underlying factor in recruitment and retention:

RRT ROLE	PAY SCALE
RT Assistant	\$16.70-\$23.50/hour
RT Trainee	\$15-\$33.00/hour
Full time RRT or CRT	\$22.08-\$52.88/hour
Traveler/Temp RRT	\$80.00-\$110/hour

- Maine has two Respiratory Therapy training programs, both in the Community College System. Despite both admitting more students than accredited, overall graduation rates are below expectation. Graduation rates are affected by student preparation – RT programs are academically rigorous with a strong emphasis on math and science – and other factors associated with going to school full-time (both programs are full-time), such as inability to work and difficulty making ends meet, and lack of satellite and remote options.

Total Training Capacity (KVCC & SMCC)			
Year	Accepted	Graduated	Grad Rate
2019	41	33	80%
2020	31	23	74%
2021	28	19	68%
2022	41	24	59%
2023	46	16	35%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>61%</b>

### **Final Recommended Actions & Strategies:**

- Promote a pathway to Respiratory Therapy from entry level clinical roles and training programs to advance a career in healthcare. Training programs identified that individuals with backgrounds as an MA, CNA, EMT, and phlebotomy have greater success in RT programs. Hospitals do a lot to promote a career pathway to nursing but not to Respiratory Therapy.
- Use “warm handoffs” between hospitals and training programs when a potential candidate has been identified or expressed interest.
- Offer job shadowing opportunities for staff who may be interested in a career in respiratory therapy.
- Encourage training programs to expand online or remote/satellite lab options. This could entail hospitals offering space or access to resources for satellite learning locations. The current training programs have little to no access to remote or satellite learning, which is a barrier for many students who may be interested in a career in respiratory therapy.
- Leverage current healthcare career marketing campaigns to promote careers in respiratory therapy. Demonstrate the broad scope of practice and importance of the role.
- Leverage the “Assistant role” model allowing an RT student to work as an assistant at the hospital and get paid while in RT school during their freshman year. This model supports hospitals and programs. Hospitals benefit from having additional support on site and being able to hire after graduation, while programs see improved graduate rates and academic success with “hands on learning and mentorship from hospital.”
- Consider adjusting compensation for respiratory therapy to attract more candidates to the field. When individuals are considering a path and they see that two programs take two years to complete and are similarly rigorous in terms of content, but one pays considerably more, they will choose the program that has higher earnings. (Nursing versus Respiratory Therapy).
- Provide more leadership opportunities for respiratory therapists, whether in quality improvement, teaching, or management, to allow individuals to grow within their profession, while also allowing them to work at their full scope of practice (vent management, intubation, etc.).

For more information regarding must-have skills for new respiratory therapists: [Must-Have Skills for New RTs - AARC](#);

For information about SMCC’s RT program: [Respiratory Therapy Associate Degree - Southern Maine Community College \(smccme.edu\)](#)

For information about KVCC’s RT program: [Respiratory Therapy - KVCC \(me.edu\)](#)

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