

# Fit to care: key knowledge skills and training for clinicians providing respiratory care



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*'Skills for Delivering High Quality Respiratory Care by Nurses in Primary Care'*  
(McArthur *et al*, 2007, revised 2015)



## Introduction

People living with respiratory disease require a significant amount of support, guidance and intervention to manage their condition effectively. These interventions should be delivered by clinicians with an appropriate level of expertise in this field. There is currently variation in the standard of respiratory care provided to patients, demonstrated by national reports such as the National Review of Asthma Deaths (NRAD)<sup>1</sup> and the COPD Audit.<sup>2</sup> This variation is affected not only by the services patients are engaged with/referred to but also the level of training, education and experience of the clinicians responsible for the provision of such care.

We recognise that, although there are respiratory specialists working within the UK who have taken a clear focus on respiratory disease, there is a wider community of practitioners who work as generalists but are still heavily involved in the day-to-day management of this patient group.

The aim of this document is to provide guidance for commissioners and clinicians to the skills, knowledge and training required by healthcare professionals working with patients with a respiratory condition in a primary or community care setting.

### **Aims and objectives of the document for those involved in the commissioning and provision of care and services to people with respiratory disease in the community**

- To guide healthcare professionals to facilitate and deliver high quality respiratory care in line with national evidence-based guidance.
- To aid healthcare professionals to assess their own competence to deliver care, and identify and seek appropriate training and ongoing professional development supported by their employers.
- To provide a reference for service managers to ensure the provision of appropriate educational support programmes for employed healthcare professionals. Such programmes will support ongoing professional development, appraisal, revalidation and training to facilitate the delivery of high quality respiratory care, staff retention and also support employee satisfaction.
- To ensure all healthcare professionals are accountable and trained to provide such care to a given standard, thereby reducing variation in care and ensuring patients can expect high-quality evidence-based respiratory care irrespective of who is delivering such care or where in the community that care is being provided.

### **Skills, knowledge and training levels for healthcare professionals providing respiratory care in a primary or community care setting**

This document has been prepared using standard, advanced and expert levels reflecting the different roles of healthcare professionals within the environment in which they work irrespective of their professional discipline. The document applies equally to doctors, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists and other allied healthcare professionals involved in the care of people with respiratory conditions.



## Key knowledge and skills required for clinicians providing **STANDARD RESPIRATORY CARE**

### **Definition of level**

For clinicians working with patients with accurately diagnosed respiratory disease or those working as generalists who are in a position to opportunistically consider an underlying or undiagnosed respiratory condition.

### **Key considerations**

A recognition of one's own limitations and competencies is paramount and clinicians require access to an experienced mentor for advice and/or ongoing supervision and reflective learning.

Clinicians should regularly source training updates and consider a reflective CPD journal using real case studies. These can be discussed during clinical supervision to support safe practice and be part of a professional revalidation process where necessary.

Clinicians remain accountable for their own practice and to their regulating body and must work to local and national protocols and guidelines.

### **Desirable skills, knowledge and training**

- Completion of or working towards completion of respiratory assessment module/s, for example:
  - Diploma module in asthma
  - Diploma module in COPD
  - NCSCT Training and Assessment Programme for Smoking Cessation or equivalent ([http://www.ncsct.co.uk/publication\\_training-and-assessment-programme.php](http://www.ncsct.co.uk/publication_training-and-assessment-programme.php))



## Key knowledge and skills required for clinicians providing STANDARD RESPIRATORY CARE

### Skills

- Accurately record clinical data and understand its significance, for example:
  - Heart rate and rhythm, respiratory rate, pulse oximetry, peak flow rate, blood pressure, carbon monoxide level
  - Scoring tools: RCP questions/ACT questionnaire, CAT score, MRC Breathlessness Scale
  - Mental health scoring tools
- Understanding of commonly used respiratory medications including indications, safety, optimal dosing, inhaler and NRT delivery devices and techniques
- Understanding of non-pharmacological interventions such as weight management, physical activity and psychological interventions
- Understanding of the holistic approach to management of long-term conditions and their impact on physical and mental well-being and the supportive role of the healthcare professional

### Knowledge

- Good understanding of respiratory anatomy and function
- Good understanding of more common respiratory pathophysiology
- Familiar with local, national and, where relevant, international guidelines for management of asthma and COPD, for example:

<https://www.brit-thoracic.org.uk/guidelines-and-quality-standards/asthma-guideline/>

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg101>

### Training

- Clinicians working at this level should have basic training in how to conduct a respiratory review accurately in a well-managed patient living with a respiratory disease
- Local NHS approved training/in-house training with a suitably qualified professional with an expertise in the field of respiratory care
- Ongoing clinical supervision with a qualified mentor working at an advanced or expert level in the field of respiratory care
- Completion of NCSCT online training 'Very Brief Advice on Smoking' or similar online, locally provided accredited course, for example:

[http://elearning.ncsct.co.uk/vba-stage\\_1](http://elearning.ncsct.co.uk/vba-stage_1)

<https://pcrs-uk.org/tobacco-dependency-0>



## Key knowledge and skills required for clinicians providing **ADVANCED RESPIRATORY CARE**

### **Definition of level**

Individuals will be able to work autonomously with patients living with respiratory disease (e.g. running respiratory clinics). This includes – but is not limited to – responsibility for assessing, treating, reviewing and providing ongoing management and support including smoking cessation counselling (with support/supervision where necessary).

For clinicians with experience of working with patients:

- presenting with respiratory symptoms
- with a respiratory diagnosis (accurate or not)
- worsening/progressive/poorly managed symptoms

### **Key considerations**

Clinicians working at this level should be competent in the criteria expected for standard level, plus:

- Advanced clinicians are expected to work as part of a team and, as such, provide education and clinical advice to colleagues responsible for the care of patients living with respiratory conditions.

### **Desirable skills, knowledge and training**

- Degree level module in respiratory assessment and/or conditions such as COPD and asthma
- Clinical examination skills including percussion and auscultation
- Understanding of possible differential diagnoses for respiratory symptoms such as breathlessness, wheeze and cough (e.g. heart failure, gastric reflux, anaemia)
- ARTP (or equivalent) approved spirometry certificate (minimum in performing test and referring to qualified mentor for interpretation)
- Able to mentor or advise clinicians providing standard levels of respiratory care



## Key knowledge and skills required for clinicians providing **ADVANCED RESPIRATORY CARE**

### Skills

### Knowledge

### Training

All skills, knowledge and training required for standard level plus:

- Able to review medication and alter/refer for alterations where necessary
- Able to formulate and review self-management plans with patients and their families/carers, etc

- Specialist knowledge and understanding of anatomy and physiology with regard to the cardiopulmonary system
- Specialist knowledge and understanding of the pathophysiology of both common and less common respiratory conditions
- In-depth knowledge of evidence-based treatments for tobacco dependency/to assist smoking cessation attempts as well as common respiratory conditions, both non-pharmacological and pharmacological

- Diploma level module/s in respiratory assessment relevant to practice; asthma; COPD
- Completed NCSCT Training and Assessment Programme for Smoking Cessation and be on the NCSCT register of certified practitioners



## Key knowledge and skills required for clinicians providing **EXPERT RESPIRATORY CARE**

### **Definition of level**

For clinicians working at a high level with complex patients requiring extensive multifaceted intervention including those:

- with worsening/progressive/poorly managed symptoms
- living with co-morbidities/multiple diagnoses
- living with mental health conditions including but not limited to addiction and substance misuse

### **Key considerations**

Clinicians working at this level should be competent in the criteria expected for advanced level plus:

- Have good understanding of the impact co-morbidities have on patients living with respiratory disease.
- Demonstrate the ability to work with patients living with both respiratory disease and mental health conditions and liaise closely with members of the MDT to ensure high standards of care and exceptional communication between disciplines.

### **Desirable skills, knowledge and training**

- Degree level module/s respiratory assessment/asthma/COPD
- Independent/non-medical prescribing qualification
- Leadership course/skill set



## Key knowledge and skills required for clinicians providing EXPERT RESPIRATORY CARE

### Skills

### Knowledge

### Training

All skills, knowledge and training required for standard level plus:

- ARTP accredited spirometry certificate – both undertaking and interpretation
- Able to take full history and possess clinical examination skills including percussion and auscultation

- Be able to consider differential diagnoses and investigate as such
- Be able to interpret results to lead to accurate diagnosis or appropriate trial of treatment
- Understand importance and relevance of motivational interviewing techniques, particularly with regard to treatment for tobacco dependence, adherence to treatment, etc.
- In-depth knowledge of evidence-based pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions
- Knowledge of appropriate referral pathways including urgent referral criteria

- MSc level or equivalent course in advanced assessment skills
- Relevant mentorship course to enable teaching and mentoring of colleagues

## Training Providers

PCRS-UK does not take responsibility for assessing individual skill levels or competencies.

The following core organisations offer accredited respiratory training programmes:-

- Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Respiratory Care (<http://www.acprc.org.uk>)
- Association for Respiratory Technology and Physiology (<http://www.artp.org.uk>)
- Education for Health (<https://www.educationforhealth.org>)
- NCSCT (<http://www.ncsct.co.uk>)
- Primary Care Respiratory Training Centre (<http://pcrtc.co.uk/pcrtc/>)

There are a number of other regional and national organisations, professional bodies, academic universities and charities who offer respiratory training programmes. Individuals can check with their local postgraduate deanery, professional body and employer for information on local and national courses.

## References

1. Royal College of Physicians. Why asthma still kills: the National Review of Asthma Deaths (NRAD) Confidential Enquiry report. London: Royal College of Physicians, 2014. <http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/sites/default/files/why-asthma-still-kills-full-report.pdf>.
2. Royal College of Physicians. COPD: 'Who cares when it matters most?' National COPD Audit Programme: Outcomes from the clinical audit of COPD exacerbations admitted to acute units in England, 2014. London: Royal College of Physicians, 2017. <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/copd-who-cares-when-it-matters-most-outcomes-report-2014>



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