

Jordan - Career Spotlight

Jordan is a Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT) who works in Regina at the Regina General Hospital.

What area of healthcare do you work in? Where do you work?

"I work in several areas of the hospital including the intensive care units (ICU), neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), emergency room (ER) and with ward patients at the Regina General Hospital."

What are you responsible for as a Respiratory Therapist (RT)? Please describe a typical day for yourself.

"Respiratory Therapists (RTs) are trained to help people with a wide variety of cardiopulmonary diseases and disorders. General duties include patient assessment, intervention and evaluation. RTs care for patients from all stages of life from premature neonates to end of life care. Many of the RTs in Regina work in all areas of the hospital but will be assigned to one area at a time.

NICU RTs are responsible for helping the tiniest patients in the hospital to breathe. They attend all high-risk deliveries to perform neonatal resuscitation which can include premature babies who have underdeveloped lungs. They are responsible for assessments, initiating, managing and weaning invasive and non-invasive ventilation, and oxygen therapy in collaboration with the NICU team. RTs also perform and assist intubations and manage artificial airways such as endotracheal tubes. They are an important member of the NICU transport team. The team travels by road or by air to transport babies from smaller centers in Saskatchewan to perform required interventions and safely bring the babies to NICU where they can receive the care they need.

RTs care for patients of all ages in the emergency room and often follow their transition to the wards or ICU. This aspect of the job requires RTs to triage tasks based on acuity. RTs are responsible for initiating, managing and weaning invasive and non-invasive ventilation. They are present for procedural sedation for airway and respiratory support. These RTs are essential members of the Code Blue team and are responsible for all airway and respiratory support in emergency situations. RTs are also responsible for drawing arterial blood gases which analyze blood pH, oxygen and carbon dioxide to assist in determining the proper intervention needed and evaluation of patient progress.

Additionally, they manage patients who are already being monitored while requiring respiratory support. Some examples of respiratory support on the wards includes high flow nasal cannula, nocturnal continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machines, as well as patients with artificial airways such as tracheostomy tubes and laryngectomy tubes. RTs assist with secretion clearance and help patients with chronic diseases. RTs can also be found educating patients and families while collaborating with other health-care professionals for discharge planning.

When working in ICU, an RT's day involves assessing patients, initiating, managing and weaning both invasive and non-invasive ventilation, performing and assisting intubations, managing artificial airways including endotracheal tubes, tracheostomy tubes and laryngectomy tubes. RTs

are responsible for drawing arterial blood gases, inserting arterial lines, and monitoring patient physiological responses to the therapy provided with arterial blood gas results and other vitals.

Other tasks may include administering inhaled medications, maintaining equipment, and transporting patients within the hospital for procedures and interfacility transports. In all intensive care areas, RTs are responsible for attending interdisciplinary rounds and collaborating with other health-care providers to provide the best patient care possible."

How is your work-life balance as a Respiratory Therapist? Please compare your current experience with other jobs you have had in the past.

"I have been an RT for 7 years, primarily as an acute care therapist working 12-hour shifts. These shifts include days, nights and weekends. I typically work 12 shifts per month. Shift work can be nice as you are able to have time off during the week when others who work "9 to 5" are at work. There are some challenges with working shift work as your shifts are longer in duration, but this allows you to work less shifts in a month. Night shifts can be both physically and mentally demanding as you need to sleep during the day when everyone else is awake and vice versa. There are RT jobs in different areas that allow you to work Monday to Friday, 9 to 5 if that is what you prefer as well."

Have you always wanted to be a Respiratory Therapist? Tell us more about your career path to becoming a RT!

"Honestly, I did not always want to be a RT. I knew I wanted to work in healthcare but didn't know RTs existed until I attended a career fair. I thought RTs were the people in the hospital who taught you about asthma, a condition I experienced as a child and thought "that's something I would like to do." I later applied to the program at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) not truly understanding what an RT does. I was successful in my application and learned quickly what job my role as an RT would look like. I then completed my one-year practicum in Regina with a rotation in Saskatoon. I started my career as an RT working in Regina in a pulmonary function lab and with home care working with home oxygen patients. I later transitioned into an acute care therapist in the hospitals working with ICU, ER and ward inpatients. I still work with all of the previously mentioned patients, but now I have expanded my role to include NICU and became part of the NICU transport team."

Are there opportunities to further your career as a Respiratory Therapist?

"There are several other areas for RTs to work both inside and outside of the hospital. These include: pulmonary function testing (PFTs), sleep disorder center, bronchoscopy, anesthesia assistant, cardiopulmonary function testing, home oxygen, asthma/COPD education, cardiac catheterization lab, perfusion, primary health, pulmonary rehabilitation, long term care, and air transport. The RT role is evolving as the profession grows."

Do you have any advice for students or new graduates looking to pursue a career as a Respiratory Therapist? Are there specialty areas that are in more demand than others?

"One piece of advice for new graduates would be that your learning has just begun. School has taught you a lot but there is still a lot to learn. Ask questions. Get involved in the situations that make you feel uncomfortable, you will become a better RT for it. There are no areas in particular that are in more demand, there are many positions available in most locations. One thing to know is that our role is slightly different between hospitals all over Canada. Do your research and decide what kind of RT you would like to be."

What is the number one thing you love about being a Respiratory Therapist?

"Every day as an RT is different which is just one of the things I love. Each day brings a new challenge and a learning opportunity. Our patients are at all stages of life from newborn to end of life as well as critically ill or severely injured and being able to help them in any way is truly rewarding."

