

Health Link

Dedicated to Better Breathing and Working To Get You There

If we live long enough, eventually we will all require the services of a respiratory therapist. They are the front-line, emergency responders when you experience trouble breathing or suffer from a heart condition.

These airway management specialists are here for your hearts and lungs from birth until old age, helping you to maintain cardiopulmonary function.

At Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare (MAHC), respiratory therapists play a broad role in the hospital setting. They can be found assisting doctors and nurses on an on-call, daily basis in areas such as the emergency department, intensive care unit, operating room and neonatal nursery.

“Respiratory therapists are often the unsung team members. They parachute in to emergency situations. They are found at the head of the bed making sure each breath is delivered, monitored and supported,” says Noreen Chan, manager of cardio-respiratory services at MAHC. “They’re the quiet team members who are valued by their health care colleagues.”

Respiratory therapists assess, monitor and treat individuals with respiratory and cardio-respiratory disorders. They provide advanced life support for patients who are extremely ill, and maintain open airways for patients that have experienced respiratory trauma, are in surgery or the intensive care unit. They also stabilize and monitor high-risk patients being moved from hospital to hospital by air or ground ambulance.

As an outpatient, there are a variety of reasons you may come across a respiratory therapist.

Your doctor may refer you for a breathing test because you are a candidate for asthma or perhaps are in need of a home oxygen assessment.

A respiratory therapist will conduct a stress test that monitors your heart, or check up on your new pacemaker.

They will educate you on how to manage asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), or be your coach in smoking cessation.

They will connect you with respiratory therapists in the community that support home oxygen and respiratory support needs.

Beyond front-line care, respiratory therapists handle the medical gases used in the hospital from inventory and in-servicing to administering those gases.

At some point in their life, every one of us could be influenced by a respiratory therapist.

Right now, one in five Ontarians have lung disease and that number is growing. Across the province 33,000 have lung cancer, 780,000 have COPD and 1.7 million suffer from asthma.

“Most people don’t realize the vital role of respiratory therapists until they need us,” says Chan. “And then they never forget how our expert skills, knowledge and abilities were pivotal in breathing life into their newborn baby or helped rescue their family member when the burden of breathing was too much to bear while they battle against life threatening trauma or disease.”

If you’re having difficulty breathing, speak to your physician about respiratory therapy.

Health Link is an awareness column brought to you on behalf of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare.