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Respiratory Care Program Thrives on Campus

High Demand for Respiratory Therapists



Respiratory Care Students in the Lab

RIVER GROVE, Ill. – Triton College's Respiratory Care Program is experiencing strong success since its launch last fall—both in the classroom and in the field. Students are thriving in the newly upgraded classrooms equipped with the latest technology, creating an immersive, hands-on learning environment.

“Respiratory therapists are highly in demand,” said Dr. Peter Jaswilko, chair of Triton College’s Allied Health. “Our students are being recruited by every health system and hired as interns. Health providers appreciate all the skills our students learn in the lab. This is a critical moment in the evolution of respiratory care.”

Respiratory care student Nicole Elbacay agrees: “Respiratory therapists have a very important role in a hospital. During COVID, many people experienced respiratory issues. We offer very critical care.”

Why Triton’s Respiratory Care Program Shines

A key strength of Triton's program is its broad network of clinical partnerships, offering students valuable hands-on experience at top healthcare facilities as far south as Advocate Christ Medical Center in Oak Lawn, as far north as Advocate Condell Medical Center in Libertyville, as far west as St. Joseph Hospital in Elgin and Advocate Good Shepherd Hospital in Barrington.

The program also earned accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Respiratory Care (CoARC) with zero citations or recommendations—an achievement that sets it apart.

"We were one of the few programs to receive this distinction," said Jaswilko. "Accreditation is challenging to obtain, and I set high standards. I don't aim for the minimum—I strive for excellence."

Jaswilko's himself is one of just 22 individuals worldwide, and the only one in Illinois, to hold all respiratory care credentials by the National Board for Respiratory Care.

"I have earned all of my board certifications thanks to my extensive experience and education," Jaswilko explained.

A Curriculum Built for Success

The program uses an eight-week course model, allowing students to focus on two classes at a time.

"There are so many benefits that come from an eight-week course," said Elbacay. "When I was taking 16-week courses, it became overwhelming over time with four midterms and finals all at once. Now that I have two classes at once, I'm really able to time manage my studying."

Students train on state-of-the-art equipment, including four ventilators for adult, pediatric, and neonatal care, high-frequency oscillator ventilator (HFOV), diagnostic pulmonary function testing (PFT) machines, and high- and low-fidelity simulators. Dr. Jaswilko also rents new equipment regularly to keep students up to date with the latest in respiratory care technology.

"I love that Triton has smaller classes," said Elbacay. "Many universities have 400 to 500 students in a classroom. At Triton, we can maintain those close connections to our instructors that you can't find at a large university."

About Respiratory Therapists

Respiratory therapists perform a wide range of duties, including diagnostic testing, managing ventilators, administering medication, drawing blood, and assisting in high-risk deliveries. They work with patients from newborns to the elderly, treating conditions such as asthma COPD, and organ failure.

Therapists may also work in research, education, rehabilitation, emergency care, outpatient clinics, sleep labs, and even flight transport. The median salary is approximately \$85,000, with entry-level salaries starting between \$65,000–\$70,000. With 25% of the workforce nearing retirement, job opportunities are growing rapidly—up 14% from 2022 to 2024. Hospitals are offering generous incentives, including signing bonuses of up to \$30,000 and student loan forgiveness.

“Respiratory therapists are such a tight-knit group,” said Elbacay. “We’re not competitive and we want each other to succeed.”

Ready to Begin?

Prospective students are encouraged to attend an upcoming information session—offered both in person and online—to learn more about the program and its requirements.

“We try to offer students different tools and resources,” he said. “We want students to succeed in this booming field.”

To learn more about the Respiratory Care Program, visit triton.edu/respiratory.

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ABOUT TRITON COLLEGE

Triton College is an institution of higher education dedicated to student success. Triton offers more than 120 degree and certificate programs designed for students to realize their career aspirations and effectively compete in a global economy. The college campus spans 110 acres in River Grove, Illinois, holds classes at satellite locations and offers online learning opportunities. Triton’s exemplary faculty and staff work to provide high-quality, convenient and affordable educational opportunities to more than 10,000 students each year. Triton College is a member of The Community Colleges of Illinois and accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. Learn more at triton.edu/.