

PATIENTS BENEFIT FROM DIVERSE SKILLS OF RESPIRATORY THERAPISTS AT ST. MARY'S GENERAL HOSPITAL

The role of Registered Respiratory Therapists (RRTs) has expanded significantly in the past decade. However, the public is largely unaware of the diverse roles of these skilled professionals.

That is something Angela Shaw and Danny Veniott, both RRTs at SMGH, hope to change.

In earlier days, the function of RRTs was very technical - they were responsible for fixing equipment. The role has now evolved into patient care, assessments, diagnostic testing and treatment plans, says Ms. Shaw.

Today the profession is growing and RRTs are an integral part of the health-care team.

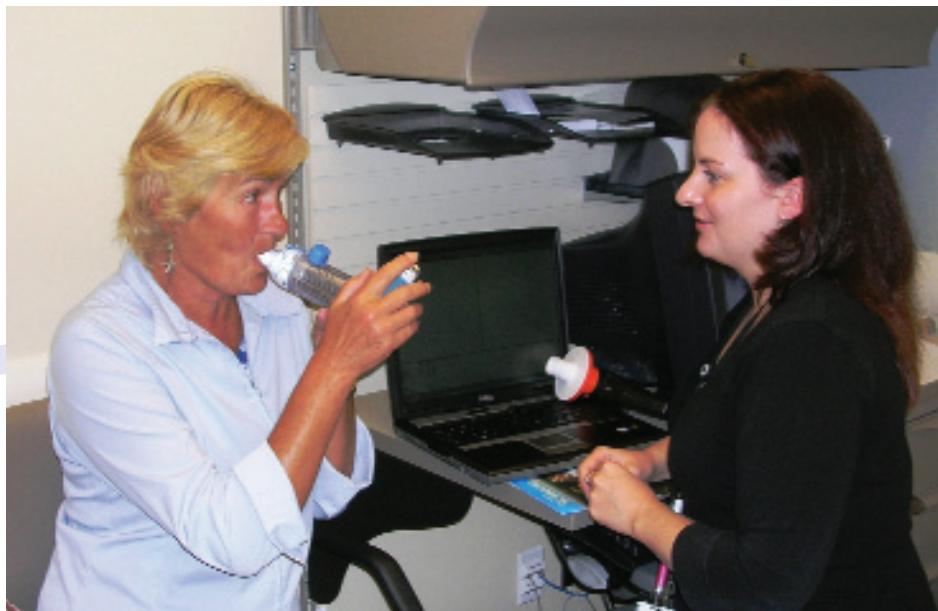
St. Mary's has 26 respiratory therapists, a greater number than similar-sized community hospitals due to the busy chest, cardiac and surgery programs at SMGH, says Mr. Veniott.

Nine of the hospital's RRTs are anesthesia assistants, a role established in 2003, well ahead of the new provincial certification program.

Mr. Veniott, an anesthesia assistant and RT program lead at SMGH, says he loves the diversity in his profession.

"I can be in the operating room one day and a day later I may be in the ICU looking after a variety of patients. There is always something new."

RRTs at St. Mary's also perform pulmonary function testing and



Patient Annette Bauman is shown in the SMGH Airway Clinic with RRT Angela Shaw.

work in the ED.

Ms. Shaw and fellow RRT Amy Kropf are both certified respiratory educators. They work in the airway clinic at SMGH, providing education and self-management strategies to patients with COPD and asthma.

"Our goal is to help patients understand their lung condition and avoid exacerbations," says Ms. Shaw. They also bring their expertise to patients in local family doctors' offices through the PRIISME program, a partnership between SMGH and GlaxoSmithKline Inc.

In 2007, the COPD Activation program, featuring education and exercise led by RRTs from St. Mary's, was added at the St. Mary's Cardiac Rehab program site in Waterloo.

In Ontario, Respiratory Therapy training programs are three or four years in duration. Conestoga College recently opened a Respiratory Therapy diploma program.

Ms. Shaw says the beauty of the profession is the variety of opportunities. "With our unique skills we can work in so many areas of the hospital and in the community. Your job can change several times over without having to change your career."

Patients benefit from the wide-ranging skills of RRTs at St. Mary's says Heather Gray, Program Manager for MSICU, CCU, Inpatient Cardiology and Respiratory Therapy.

"They're definitely an asset to the team," says Ms. Gray.