



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

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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)¹ and the National Asthma and COPD Audit (NACAP).² 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 COVID-19 pandemic has seen primary care take an increased role in vaccination, breathlessness assessment and support for people living with post COVID syndromes that include respiratory symptoms, and may benefit from some therapies usually associated with chronic respiratory disease.

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

- How to use 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
- To provide a reference for service managers to ensure the provision of appropriate educational support programmes for healthcare professionals. Such programmes should 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 have an accountability framework and feel assured that they are 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.

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.

Delegation and Supervision

As this diversity of healthcare professionals continues to grow in within primary care, it is essential that those who have responsibility for the delegation and supervision of tasks have sufficient knowledge and expertise to do so safely. Clinical supervision is recognised as a professional skill that requires training and CPD. The skills of supervision are often easier for clinicians in your own professional speciality but with many other disciplines working in primary care good supervision requires an understanding of the training and skills of other professional groups as well as understanding the experience that each individual brings. It is easy, but dangerous to assume that clinicians have all been trained in and think in similar ways.

This multi-disciplinary approach to the provision of patient centred care requires any person acting as a clinical supervisor to have a knowledge of the clinician that they intend to support and delegate to. This includes understanding their normal working practice, competency and skill level. It also requires a responsibility of a more senior clinician to oversee, support and provide regular review to ensure all clinicians involved in delegation and supervision maintain their own competence and skills as part of their mandatory appraisal and revalidation.

Key knowledge and skills required for clinicians providing standard respiratory care

Definition of level

For clinicians working with patients with accurately diagnosed chronic 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
 - Module in current respiratory related vaccination
 - Diploma module in child and young persons asthma care
 - Remote consultation methods
 - NCSCT Training and Assessment Programme for Smoking Cessation or equivalent (<https://www.ncsct.co.uk/>)
 - ARTP spirometry certification +/- CYP component

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 three questions/ACT questionnaire, CAT score, MRC Breathlessness Scale
 - Mental health scoring tools
- Inhaler and NRT delivery techniques
- In person and remote consultation skills including basic behaviour change interventions e.g. Very Brief Advice and motivational interviewing
- Be able to communicate how we breathe in health and when unwell and teach simple techniques about how to breathe better

Knowledge

- Good understanding of respiratory anatomy and function
- Good understanding of more common respiratory pathophysiology e.g. asthma and COPD
- Knowledge and understanding of commonly used respiratory medications including indications, safety and optimal dosing
- Knowledge and understanding of non-pharmacological interventions such as weight management, physical activity and psychological interventions
- Knowledge and understanding of the holistic approach to the management of long-term conditions and their impact on physical and mental well being and the supportive role of the healthcare professional
- Familiar with local, national and, where relevant, international guidelines for management of asthma and COPD

Training

- Clinicians working at this level should have basic training in how to conduct a respiratory review 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 as a precursor to formal diploma level or similar
- Ongoing clinical supervision with a qualified mentor working at an advanced or expert level in the field of respiratory care
- Completion of NCSCT online module 1
- Completion of a respiratory vaccination module
- Completion of an inhaler technique module

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 chronic respiratory clinics). This includes – but is not limited to – responsibility for assessing, treating, reviewing and providing ongoing management and support including treating tobacco dependency (with support/supervision where necessary).

These clinicians have the ability to diagnose or question a current diagnosis in someone who:

- presents with respiratory symptoms
- Present with symptoms or treatment responses inconsistent with current diagnosis
- Can recognise, assess and recommend treatment for acute exacerbation or change in status of chronic respiratory diseases

Key considerations

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

- Advanced clinicians are expected to act as the role model in 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 acute and chronic respiratory assessment and/or conditions such as COPD and asthma and acute respiratory infection (including COVID-19) or acute breathlessness
- Clinical examination skills including percussion and auscultation
- Understanding of possible differential diagnoses for respiratory symptoms such as acute and chronic breathlessness, wheeze and cough (e.g. heart failure, gastric reflux, anaemia)
- Nationally recognised spirometry certificate (minimum in performing test and referring to qualified mentor for interpretation)
- Able to mentor and advise clinicians providing standard levels of respiratory care

Key knowledge and skills required for clinicians providing advanced respiratory care

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

Skills

- Able to perform spirometry with reversibility testing correctly
- Making referrals for relevant investigations e.g. FBC, BNP and CXR
- Making referrals for pulmonary rehabilitation and respiratory specialist review e.g. recognises criteria for severe or difficult asthma
- Making referrals to appropriate mental health and social care professionals
- Able to formulate and review self-management plans with patients and their families/carers

Knowledge

- Specialist knowledge and understanding of anatomy and physiology with regard to the cardiopulmonary system e.g. able to explain atrial fibrillation and impact of deconditioning on skeletal muscle
- Specialist knowledge and understanding of the pathophysiology of both common and less common respiratory conditions e.g. interstitial lung disease and bronchiectasis
- In-depth knowledge of evidence-based treatments for tobacco dependency/ to assist smoking cessation attempts
- Understands how to individualise pharmacological and non pharmacological options in asthma and COPD according to patient status
- Specialist knowledge and understanding of the psychosocial implications of respiratory disease and its impact on the person and their family and carers?

Training

- Diploma level clinical skills 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 Level 2

Key knowledge and skills required for clinicians providing expert respiratory care

Definition of level

For clinicians working at a high level with clinical complexity requiring extensive multifaceted intervention including those:

- with worsening/progressive/poorly managed symptoms
- living with co-morbidities/multiple diagnoses
- requiring advanced care planning
- living with mental health conditions including but not limited to addiction and substance misuse
- requiring oxygen therapy, biologic medications, surgical interventions

Key considerations

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

- Have good understanding of the identification and basic management of co-morbidities in 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.
- Recognises the limitations of the practice scope or field and is able to refer for specialist opinion as appropriate?
- Provides shared care with hospital services

Desirable skills, knowledge and training

- Masters level module/s clinical assessment skills in respiratory assessment/asthma/COPD
- Independent/non-medical prescribing qualification
- Leadership involvement in primary care networks, patient safety, clinical governance
- Understanding audits, risk stratification and quality improvement tools and strategy and their uses.
- Understands and critiques primary research in relevant fields
- Able to interpret tests (including blood, radiology and spirometry) in a clinical context

Key knowledge and skills required for clinicians providing expert respiratory care

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

Skills

- Interpreter of investigation results including spirometry
- Prescriber
- Recognises the limitations of the practice scope or field and is able to refer for specialist opinion as appropriate (for example echocardiography, cardiology, referral for consideration of surgery or biologics)?
- Able to contribute to commissioning and service design / redesign projects
- Educator at practice or locality network level

Knowledge

- 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
- In-depth knowledge of evidence-based pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions
- Knowledge of appropriate referral pathways including urgent referral criteria

Training

- MSc level or equivalent course in advanced assessment skills
- Relevant assessor course to enable teaching and mentoring of colleagues
- Leadership course and ongoing group or individual mentoring
- Quality improvement methodology and processes

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/>)
- Rotherham Respiratory (<https://rotherhamrespiratory.com/>)

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.: Wales primary care clinical audit report 2020
3. <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/wales-primary-care-clinical-audit-report-2020>



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