



COMMISSION ON ACCREDITATION FOR RESPIRATORY CARE

CoARC Communication to our Communities of Interest:

Response to AARC Position Statement on Respiratory Therapist Education

Originally Published January 28, 2016 (Revised December 1, 2017)

The mission of the Commission on Accreditation for Respiratory Care (CoARC) is to ensure that high quality educational programs prepare competent respiratory therapists for practice, education, research and service. To achieve its mission, the CoARC holds programs accountable to their communities of interest - the profession, patients, employers, students and their families, practitioners - and to one another, by ensuring that program graduates are competent to fulfill their expected roles. The CoARC uses the *Accreditation Standards for Entry into Respiratory Care Professional Practice* to ensure that all accredited programs can prepare students to successfully complete the National Board for Respiratory Care (NBRC) credentialing examinations. These examinations objectively assess the extent to which program graduates have achieved the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities required of a Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT).

On January 5th, 2016, the American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC) revised its [position statement](#) on Respiratory Therapist Education. The AARC's new position is that all programs applying for accreditation be able to award a minimum of a baccalaureate degree upon student completion of programmatic and degree requirements. The position statement emphasizes that the AARC supports continuing the accreditation of existing associate degree programs that meet the CoARC Standards.

The CoARC acknowledges that respiratory therapists with baccalaureate and graduate education are needed in larger numbers to serve as educators, researchers, managers, clinical specialists, and other roles throughout the healthcare delivery system. Likewise the CoARC recognizes the prominent role played by associate degree respiratory therapy programs. To support the increasing extent and complexity of the skills required of graduates of Respiratory Care programs and the associated movement of the profession toward baccalaureate and graduate degrees, the CoARC Board of Commissioners, along with the AARC, ACCP, and ATS, approved the following change to Standard 1.01 in the *Accreditation Standards for Entry into Respiratory Care Professional Practice*, effective January 1, 2018:

~~An Except as provided in the following sentence, an~~ educational sponsor must be a post-secondary academic institution accredited by a regional or national accrediting agency that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and must ~~be authorized under applicable law or other acceptable authority to~~ award graduates of the program a ~~an associate or higher~~ baccalaureate or graduate degree upon ~~at the~~ completion of the program. For associate degree programs that applied for accreditation or were accredited prior to January 1, 2018, an educational sponsor must be a post-secondary academic institution accredited by a regional or national accrediting agency that is recognized by the USDE. These programs may continue to award graduates of the program an associate degree as long as they remain in compliance with the CoARC Standards.

The intended effect of this change is that if the sponsor of a proposed Respiratory Care educational program is capable of granting only an associate degree (or equivalent) upon completion of the program, the sponsor must submit a Letter of Intent Application to the CoARC Executive Office on or before January 1, 2018.

To facilitate a consensus, information was provided to, and input solicited from, all the CoARC's communities of interest during the formal revision process outlined below. Before finalizing any changes to the Standards, CoARC provided advance public notice of the proposed revisions. The CoARC has also developed an FAQ (see last page of this announcement) in an effort to address concerns and questions from sponsoring institutions, programs, and students.

Following November 2016 CoARC Board meeting:

10. Sent the final version of the Standards to the CoARC's collaborating organizations (AARC, ATS, ASA, and ACCP) for endorsement as per CoARC Bylaw 2.05.01.
11. The endorsed Standards' revision posted on the CoARC web site and will go into effect as of January, 1 2018. An e-mail announcement was distributed to all communities of interest.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

(CHANGES TO STANDARD 1.01)

What effect will the change have on existing accredited associate degree programs?

Existing associate degree programs will be able to participate in the accreditation process provided that they continue to comply with CoARC Standards and Policies. Programs with citations will still be allowed to continue.

My sponsoring institution has submitted a Letter of Intent application for an associate degree program. How will this change impact us?

There will be no impact on your application as long as the Letter of Intent Application is submitted to the CoARC Executive by January 1, 2018. The process for seeking an Approval of Intent remains the same.

How many applications for new associate degree programs have there been in recent years?

In 2012, there were two Letter of Intent applications submitted by sponsoring institutions limited to granting an Associate degree. Between 2012 and 2016, there were no applications submitted by such institutions; two applications for associate degree programs were submitted by sponsoring institutions able to grant a baccalaureate or higher degree.

What if my program has a Letter of Intent or Approval of Intent as of January 1, 2018? Will we still receive accreditation?

Yes. All sponsoring institutions seeking accreditation of an associate degree program that have submitted a Letter of Intent application by 1/1/18 will receive Provisional Accreditation if they complete the application process for Provisional Accreditation.

What happens if my associate degree program withdraws after January 1, 2018 and we subsequently seek reaccreditation?

In the reaccreditation process, applicant programs are considered to be new programs and must therefore comply with current, applicable Standards. Accordingly, after January 1, 2018, for such an application to be considered, the program sponsor would need to be capable of awarding a baccalaureate or graduate degree upon program completion.

For questions regarding this communication, please contact Tom Smalling, Executive Director, at 817-283-2835 ext. 101 or by email at tom@coarc.com.