



# ON THE SUBJECT OF CREDENTIALS

by Sandra McCleaster RRT

I recently congratulated three recent graduates who had passed their CRT exam. "So, you're planning to take your registry exams real soon, right?" I asked. "Nope." Not one of them. The look I got could best be described as "duh". But I pressed on.

I've always been a staunch supporter of earning the RRT credential. But for years, therapists have been challenging me, asking why they should take two notoriously stressful and expensive exams, only to receive little or no tangible benefit. Quite frankly, the more time that's gone by, the harder pressed I've become to give them a good answer. But now there's the best answer of all: "Because if you don't, you will no longer be able to." Let's just say it casts a different light on the subject.

As it turns out, 2007 is a watershed year for those RCPs who value National Board for Respiratory Care (NBRC) credentials. There are two important deadlines looming.

The first is aimed at those thousands of CRTs who plan to sit for and pass the advanced level exams, well...someday. Which speaks to the rather obvious fact: the waiting line to take the advanced level exams that could earn certified therapists the title Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT) has slowed to a trickle. It seems that once they earn the CRT credential, modern day practitioners no longer feel the need to become an RRT. This is not altogether surprising, since there's little or no distinction between the two levels in the workforce. There's also the economic factor that presents another big obstacle to the RRT exam system. In truth, the reasons why CRTs have lost interest or lack incentive to take the registry exams are actually far too numerous to mention here, but now, it may all be moot as it is simply time to "sit or get off the pot."

The NBRC has established a deadline for "registry-eligible" practitioners to earn the RRT credential. New graduates will have three years to do it. If they don't, they will be required to become "re-credentialed" by retaking and passing the CRT exam in order to regain eligibility for the registry exam system. All the rest of the "I'm gonna do it someday" people have until Dec 31 of this year to take and pass the written Registry and Clinical Simulation exams. Those who don't will suffer the same fate as the new grads. In case you haven't noticed, we're approaching the eleventh hour.

The next deadline is for those who've earned their NBRC credentials after July 2002. All CRT and RRT credentials awarded after that date are awarded for a five-year period only. Participation in the NBRC's Continued Competency Program (CCP) is now required for renewal of these credentials every five years. (Credentials earned prior to 2002 are not affected.) The CCP is another name for the NBRC continuing education system. And if you want to keep your credential(s), you need to participate in it. There are three options for renewal: 1) earn 30 hours of continu-

ing education credit; 2) re-take the credentialing exam for the highest credential you hold; or 3) pass another NBRC credentialing exam, not previously completed. Not surprisingly, there will be a fee attached to this. Option 1 is \$125. Option 2 or 3 is the respective exam application fee.

Now, what if you don't do this? Does this mean you can't practice respiratory care any more? No, it does not. The NBRC does not wield the power of law. Your privilege to practice comes from your state's licensing board, not from the NBRC. But what it does mean is that your credential(s) will lapse. In other words, you can no longer officially call yourself a CRT or RRT. (Or CPFT, RPFT, or NPS for that matter.) These are registered trademarks owned by the NBRC and as they say, 'what the Lord giveth, the Lord can taketh away.' This means, that if you fail to renew your credential(s) through the CCP and assuming you are an honest, law-abiding RCP, you would make sure that the letters CRT and RRT are removed from your identity. (Whether practitioners do this remains to be seen. How, or by whom this will be enforced also remains to be seen. I suspect this could be more difficult to enforce than our national immigration laws.) But from a purely practical standpoint, whether or not you participate in the NBRC CCP has no effect on your day to day practice of respiratory care. Does that mean you don't have to participate in continuing education? Well, not exactly and I certainly hope not. (If you consider yourself a professional, continuing education should be a part of your life.) But, co-incidentally your state requires continuing education credits too, as well it should. The same credits you earn for your state could be used to cover the CCP. (Just don't forget, of course, to enclose your check for \$125.) The CCP program requires that your continuing education information be submitted to the NBRC no later than 60 days prior to the expiration date of your credentials. So those therapists who earned credentials in the latter part of 2002 are on the hook as of this writing. For sure, there will be thousands of respiratory care practitioners who will sidestep the credentialing issues entirely and will go about their work as licensed practitioners without thought or care. "A rose by any other name ...." as one recently told me.

But I'm old and set in my ways. I guess I'll never really "get" it. When I think of credentials, I can't help thinking of how hard we worked just for the right to earn them. Wouldn't you think we'd covet them? And want to preserve them? Time will tell.

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