



**AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR RESPIRATORY CARE**

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**Recognizing Respiratory Therapists  
Under the Medicare Home Health Services Benefit**

**Patients Need Access to Respiratory Therapists in the Home**

- The Medicare statute does not recognize respiratory therapy services under the home health services benefit (Section 1861(m) of the Social Security Act).
- Medicare regulations recognize home respiratory therapy services that are part of a plan of care by a skilled nurse or physical therapist and that constitute skilled care (Section 409.46 of the Code of Federal Regulations).
- Because the services of respiratory therapists are not considered skilled visits, homebound Medicare patients suffering from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis, and those who are ventilator dependent do not have access to respiratory therapists in their homes.

**Medicare's Home Health Services Benefit**

Under Section 1861(m) of the Social Security Act, home health services include:

- (1) part-time or intermittent nursing care;
- (2) physical, or occupational therapy, or speech-language pathology services;
- (3) medical social services;
- (4) part-time or intermittent services of a home health aide;
- (5) medical supplies and durable medical equipment;
- (6) medical services provided by an intern or resident-in-training; and
- (7) any of the foregoing items and services which are provided on an outpatient basis under arrangements by the home health agency.

**AARC's Request**

Amend Section 1861(m) of the Social Security Act by adding the following language:

**“For purposes of paragraph (1) and (2), when respiratory therapy services are furnished as part-time or intermittent nursing care or physical therapy services under a home health plan of care, a respiratory therapist, acting within the therapist’s scope of practice, may furnish such services.”**

## **As a Result of this Change . . .**

Home health agencies would have the option of utilizing respiratory therapists when respiratory therapy services are furnished as part of a plan of care by a skilled nurse or physical therapist. Home health agencies would not be mandated to use respiratory therapists, nor would respiratory therapists provide nursing care or physical therapy.

## **The Benefits of Using Respiratory Therapists in Home Care**

- Homebound Medicare patients with respiratory diseases could receive skilled visits from respiratory therapists which could help to decrease emergency room visits, shorten lengths of stays, and avoid readmissions.
- Home health agencies could meet patient needs while controlling costs through greater flexibility in resource utilization.
- Physicians could tailor treatment plans based on their patients' needs and the knowledge that, if medically necessary, they could utilize the services of nurses, physical therapists **or** respiratory therapists to provide home respiratory therapy.
- The federal government could offer more choices to patients, physicians, and home health agencies without incurring additional expense to the Medicare program.

## **Who Are Respiratory Therapists?**

- Respiratory therapists are the only health care professionals who receive formal education, clinical training, and validated competency testing in respiratory therapy. They are licensed in over 40 states.
- There are approximately 120,000 respiratory therapists in the United States. They work in all health care settings, although the majority are currently employed by hospitals.
- Respiratory therapists' clinical responsibilities range from support of ventilator dependent patients to disease management of asthma and COPD patients. Respiratory therapists assist physicians and nurses by providing assessment and treatment of respiratory patients and are considered experts in this area.

**Please support patient access to respiratory therapists  
under the Medicare home health services benefit.**

For more information, please contact  
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January 2004