



5 Questions for Four 21st Century RTs

They haven't been in the profession long, but these young professionals are already making their mark



Listen in to any conversation between aging members of the respiratory care profession and you'll hear a common refrain: "Where are all the leaders of the future going to come from?" And, "Why aren't we doing more to mentor new people into leadership roles?"

Baby boomers, listen up: The respiratory care profession is alive and well and producing leaders as we speak. These young people are full of enthusiasm for respiratory care; dedicated to ensuring high-quality care for their patients; and ready, willing, and able to take on the challenges of the 21st century. And yes, they've been mentored by the likes of you — clinicians and educators who have taken the time to guide them in their career decisions, answer their questions about everything from life to clinical care, and be there for them when they've had issues or concerns.

AARC Times went out and found four great examples to prove the point, and we think you'll agree these young therapists have what it takes to carry on the mission of the profession. If they are any indication of the future, the future is bright indeed.

▶ Natalie Napolitano



**BS, RRT-NPS, AE-C, Pediatric Clinical Manager,
Respiratory Care Services, Inova Fairfax Hospital &
Inova Fairfax Hospital for Children, Falls Church, VA**

1. When did you first learn about respiratory therapy, and what led you to enter the profession?

Napolitano: During my first year as a counselor at MDA Summer Camp, one of the campers in my cabin slept in an iron lung machine and many of the older kids were ventilator-dependent. While talking with them and their parents about their year, the kids would always mention the fun things they did and their friends at school, while their parents provided a medical update. They always raved about the respiratory therapist who “saved their lives” when they were in the hospital over the winter with pneumonia or who helped them realize that they could still do everything they wanted while attached to a ventilator. After hearing such wonderful reviews, I didn’t know what a respiratory therapist was but I knew that was what I wanted to be.

2. Where did you go to respiratory therapy school, and how did your experiences there affect your career?

Napolitano: Gannon University in Erie, PA. The baccalaureate program was very comprehensive, and I was exposed to every established aspect of respiratory care, as well as the potential of the profession.

3. Did you have a special mentor in school or after you graduated who helped you in your career? If so, who was your mentor and how did this person make a difference in your life?

Napolitano: Throughout my career at Inova Fairfax Hospital, I have had the pleasure of having three mentors who helped me achieve my professional goals and who will continue to be mentors to me throughout my life — Nancy Collar, RRT-NPS, AE-C; Thomas

Malinowski, RRT, FAARC; and Gerilynn Connors, RRT, FAACVPR. Each has shown me how to facilitate actions in the best interests of our patients, encouraged me to participate on a larger scale through the Virginia Society for Respiratory Care (VSRC) and AARC, and set an example of leadership that I strive to live up to in my current roles as clinical manager and president of the VSRC.

4. What do you believe are your top two accomplishments in the profession so far?

Napolitano: In the seven years that I have been in the profession, I have had the opportunity to do many things. I have worked my way up the ladder to my current position as a clinical manager and am also serving as the president of the VSRC. In my clinical practice, I have had the opportunity to start programs that have enabled people to better manage their disease process. I created a respiratory care patient educator program and also founded a local asthma camp that has been operating for six years.

5. Where do you see yourself in the profession within the next five years, and how do you plan to get there?

Napolitano: I am currently working toward my master’s degree in public health policy and hope to branch out into the nonprofit/government realm where respiratory care has the potential to make a tremendous impact. I see many areas where our knowledge and expertise can greatly help prevent pulmonary problems and enhance the quality of care of people living with pulmonary disease. I am not quite ready to leave clinical practice yet, but maybe in five years or so. ■

Sneakers or flip flops?

Can I say Birkenstocks?

Favorite breakfast cereal?

Oatmeal

Lab coat or scrubs?

Scrubs

Last movie you saw?

“Juno”

Last book you read?

“Leaving Microsoft to Save the World,” by John Wood

Where would you go on your dream vacation?

Italy

If you could invite anyone in the world to dinner, who would it be and why?

My paternal grandfather. I never met him, as he died before I was born.

▶ J. Brady Scott

RRT, Clinical Supervisor, Respiratory Care Services
Duke University Medical Center, Durham, NC

1. When did you first learn about respiratory therapy, and what led you to enter the profession?

Scott: In my early teens I spent two summers as a “junior” volunteer at a local hospital. It was there that I was introduced to several different health care professions, and honestly, I thought the title of “respiratory therapist” sounded pretty important. A few years later my dad completed a respiratory therapy technician program while he recovered from a work-related injury. Although he never actually entered the profession, he and I discussed respiratory therapy often, and I found out the simple act of breathing was actually very interesting. I originally entered college as a nursing major, but while completing my pre-requisite coursework, I found myself looking for something that was a better match for my interests. I researched other health care professions and realized the focus of respiratory therapy suited me best.

2. Where did you go to respiratory therapy school, and how did your experiences there affect your career?

Scott: I attended the respiratory care program at Lexington Community College (now Bluegrass Community and Technical College) in Lexington, KY. The classroom and clinical training I received there really prepared me to begin my career as a respiratory therapist. The great faculty and clinical instructors truly took an interest in student development. One of the faculty members, Ron Wasielewski, MSEd, RRT, often spoke of his time as a respiratory therapy intern at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, NC. Duke seemed like a place I’d like to work; so as graduation approached and I began evaluating my options, I decided to give them a call.

3. Did you have a special mentor in school or after you graduated who helped you in your career? If so, who was your mentor and how did this person make a difference in your life?

Scott: I have been very fortunate to have so many people positively influence my career. Several have taken a lot of their own time to teach me what they know about respiratory therapy at the patient bedside. Others have taught me how to design, conduct, and present a research project that started with a simple clinical question. I’ve also found that people are willing to be mentors if you are willing to be mentored. Houston R. Anderson, RRT, FAARC, who founded our department, but whom I unfortunately never had the opportunity to meet, left behind the legacy of mentoring at Duke. I was lucky enough to start my career here, where mentors abound.

4. What do you believe are your top two accomplishments in the profession so far?

Scott: I received the 2007 Adult Acute Care Specialty Practitioner of the Year award. In my opinion, just being nominated and listed with the others who have previously received that award is a huge accomplishment. I was also promoted to clinical supervisor around the same time. Being trusted to help lead and further advance a department full of fantastic respiratory therapists and staff was quite an honor.

5. Where do you see yourself in the profession within the next five years, and how do you plan to get there?

Scott: I plan to continue my formal education, develop mentoring skills, and continue growing as a respiratory therapist. I would like to hone my skills as a presenter and continue to ask questions that lead to research. I hope to advance my career, my department, and my profession as a whole. My plan to get there is through hard work and persistence — and a little bit of luck. ■



Sneakers or flip flops? Flip flops

Favorite breakfast cereal? Honeycombs

Lab coat or scrubs? Scrubs

Last movie you saw? “No Country for Old Men”

Last book you read? “All About Wine,” by Jonathan Ray

Where would you go on your dream vacation? Anywhere that’s not experiencing a hurricane (it’s a long story).

If you could invite anyone in the world to dinner, who would it be and why? My wife, of course. She’s been a source of encouragement throughout this journey... and we both enjoy spicy food!

▶ Rachel Blake

BS, RRT, Staff Therapist, University of Minnesota Medical Center – Fairview, Minneapolis, MN



Photo by Joe Kane, Mayo Clinic

1. When did you first learn about respiratory therapy, and what led you to enter the profession?

Blake: I first learned about it when I was in my sophomore year of college majoring in a different field. I was unhappy with what I was majoring in and went searching for something else. I had known that I wanted to do something in health care ever since I was in a house fire when I was young. I vividly recall the respiratory illness that I went through after that. I don't think you can find a better job than one that leaves you with a good feeling on your drive home each and every night — a feeling of helping someone to breathe better, to live another day, or to take their dying breaths with ease. Respiratory care just seemed to be the perfect fit for me.

2. Where did you go to respiratory therapy school, and how did your experiences there affect your career?

Blake: I went to the University of Minnesota-Mayo School of Health Sciences, baccalaureate program. My experiences there were priceless. I studied at one of the best hospitals in the world and, therefore, got to see some very interesting and rare patient cases. I also worked alongside some of the most intelligent caregivers in the nation. I found that studying at an academic hospital really enhanced my learning. I wasn't the only one learning; I was right in there with the residents and fellows, and we were all learning from each other and teaching each other. This environment really taught me that we all have some valuable knowledge to contribute to the patient and that our role on the interdisciplinary team is an important one.

3. Did you have a special mentor in school or after you graduated who helped you in your career? If so, who was your mentor and how did this person make a difference in your life?

Blake: I would have to say my professor, Jeffrey Ward, MEd, RRT, CPFT, FAARC. The first day that I came to look into respiratory school I felt like he was taking me under his wing and making me feel extremely comfortable. There were many late-night

e-mails sent and early morning office visits when I was in a panic about a test or simulation. He was always there to say “Rachel, turn down the Bunsen burner” — his way of telling me to CHILL OUT. Then he would walk me through whatever it was I was anxious or nervous about. I don't think I would have made it through school without him. After I graduated, he was still there to encourage me as I began my career; and whenever I see him, I walk away with a valuable piece of information about respiratory care that I may not have known before.

4. What do you believe are your top two accomplishments in the profession so far?

Blake: When I was in my third year in the respiratory care program, I wrote a paper on lymphangioleiomyomatosis and submitted it to the AARC. It received the NBRC/AMP Robert M. Lawrence, MD Education Recognition Award. The AARC flew me to Las Vegas to receive the award, and it was something that I will never forget. It was the first time I felt like I contributed something to the profession of respiratory care. The second would have to be competing in the National Sputum Bowl® student competition in Orlando in late 2007. It, again, was something that helped me to feel like I fit into the world of respiratory care.

5. Where do you see yourself in the profession within the next five years, and how do you plan to get there?

Blake: I see myself still doing critical care respiratory therapy in some fashion. I really enjoy the ICU, but I would also like to extend my hands into emergency room care and even flight transport care. I am also very interested in ECMO [extracorporeal membrane oxygenation] and hope to be trained in that area of the profession as well. However, I would say that my heart is in pediatric/neonatal care, and I look forward to the job I have recently started where I am going to be able to get my feet wet in that area. I am lucky that the hospital I am at now is a place that encourages us to dabble in all areas of the profession. Furthermore, I really enjoyed school and can definitely see myself going back to school for an advanced degree within the next several years as well. ■

Sneakers or flip flops?

Is bare feet a choice?

Favorite breakfast cereal?

Honey Bunches of Oats

Lab coat or scrubs?

Scrubs, most comfortable invention in my mind

Last movie you saw?

“Once,” this little Irish film with amazing music

Last book you read?

“Blue Like Jazz,” by Donald Miller

Where would you go on your dream vacation?

Australia and New Zealand

If you could invite anyone in the world to dinner, who would it be and why?

My maternal grandmother. She passed away before I was born; but if she is anything like my mother, I would love to meet her.



▶ Thomas Knowles

BS, RRT, RPSGT
Clinical Instructor, Cardiothoracic Anesthesia
Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, OH

Sneakers or flip flops?

Sneakers

Favorite breakfast cereal?

Cocoa Pebbles

Lab coat or scrubs?

Scrubs

Last movie you saw?

“Semi-Pro”

Last book you read?

“The Laws of Money, The Lessons of Life,” by Suze Orman

Where would you go on your dream vacation?

St. Tropez

If you could invite anyone in the world to dinner, who would it be and why?

Halle Berry. She’s gorgeous! As long as I had my wife’s permission, of course.

1. When did you first learn about respiratory therapy, and what led you to enter the profession?

Knowles: I first learned about respiratory therapy in my freshman year of college. I was a biology/pre-med major, and I was already tired of lecture/lab courses. So, I decided that I needed to do something that involved direct patient care. I attended an open house for allied health; and of all the disciplines represented, I thought respiratory therapy was the best fit.

2. Where did you go to respiratory therapy school, and how did your experiences there affect your career?

Knowles: I attended The Ohio State University (OSU). It was a wonderful experience. I made friends in our program whom I will keep for life. At OSU we were taught to think about what we were doing as therapists; and we received a good foundation to move into teaching, research, and management in respiratory therapy.

3. Did you have a special mentor in school or after you graduated who helped you in your career? If

so, who was your mentor and how did this person make a difference in your life?

Knowles: F. Herb Douce, MS, RRT-NPS, RPFT, helped me in more ways than he knows. He was instrumental in my development as a researcher and clinical instructor.

4. What do you believe are your top two accomplishments in the profession so far?

Knowles: My top two accomplishments so far have been becoming a clinical instructor and earning the RPSGT credential in addition to my RRT.

5. Where do you see yourself in the profession within the next five years, and how do you plan to get there?

Knowles: I see myself moving solidly into research and possibly product development. I want to remain up-to-date, so I will always teach or attend school. I see myself as a lifelong student. ■