

SPOTLIGHT ON PROGRAMS

Respiratory

Sharon Hatfield, R.R.T., M.B.A., has a lot of experience in bringing fresh ideas to established programs. As the new program director for one of the College's oldest programs, she is confident the outlook for the respiratory therapy program is as exciting as it was in 1982. "This program has played a vital role in community health in the Roanoke Valley, and we will continue that tradition," says Hatfield.

"Sharon brings a wealth of professional and managerial experience to the program. Her energy and singular enthusiasm is just what the program needs, and I feel confident she will do an extraordinary job for the College," says Paul Lemons, former director for the program.



Photo by Jan Bradshaw

Sharon Hatfield has an M.B.A in Healthcare Administration from City University, a B.A. in Health Services from St. Mary's College and an A.S. in Respiratory Therapy from Ohlone Junior College.

"Based on my experience as director of programs in the San Francisco Bay area, Georgia, and North Carolina, I firmly believe that change is necessary and beneficial for a program to keep pace with the ever-changing medical environment," says Hatfield.

She is anxious to gauge how the College can facilitate positive change in the healthcare situation in the Roanoke Valley through outreach initiatives and clinical opportunities. "My

job is to assess the needs of community leaders in respiratory therapy to see what they desire in our graduates, and to use this information to prepare our graduates to function as extremely knowledgeable and highly skilled professionals who have problem solving and decision making skills."

Hatfield continues, "The public is not aware of our profession. Our students hope to change that by participating in community service. Recently, our program formed a partnership with the American Lung Association to provide asthma education for our local school children."

There is a critical shortage of respiratory therapists in

Virginia and across the nation. Respiratory therapists are the primary managers of life support ventilators. "Virtually everyone experiences someone in their circle of friends or family who have had trouble breathing or have been on ventilators," she explains. Respiratory therapists help patients with asthma, emphysema, COPD, and pneumonia. They also manage life support for premature babies, accident victims, post surgery patients, and heart patients.

Respiratory therapists also monitor and analyze EKG's, read chest x-rays, and take arterial blood. Because of their diversified job description, medical professionals agree that respiratory therapists are the most multi-skilled healthcare providers in the hospital. They are trained to act as a technical resource person for both physicians and other healthcare professionals.

Hatfield is a firm believer in the well-rounded respiratory graduate entering the field with a working knowledge of the financial side of healthcare. "I understand the importance of the business aspect of healthcare. Quality performance improvement, cost-saving measures, billing, and reimbursement need to be taught along with medical training."

Respiratory therapists are at the forefront of bringing palliative care to the Roanoke Valley. In fact, respiratory therapists were implementing palliative care into long-term delivery of care before the term was even coined. "We have been involved in long-term care and making patients comfortable since respiratory started as a field. We help patients breathe comfortably in non-invasive ways. Quality of life is important to us when we care for our patients." •