



**THE DIRECTOR (OR HEAD) OF THE RESPIRATORY FUNCTION
LABORATORY***

**A position statement of the Thoracic Society of Australia and New
Zealand**

Definition

The Director (or Head) is a suitably qualified medical practitioner who is responsible for all aspects of the operation of a laboratory for the performance of respiratory physiological studies. In particular, the Director must ensure the appropriate use of laboratory space, equipment and personnel in a cost effective manner and the adequate provision for quality control and patient safety. The Director is responsible for the prompt and accurate interpretation and reporting of test results and their communication to the referring practitioner.

Qualifications

1. Training

The Director must be a registered medical practitioner in the State in which he/she practises, and must possess substantial expertise in clinical respiratory physiology. The minimum requirement for adequate training would be participation in a program of two years duration in accredited respiratory function laboratories in Australia and New Zealand or in comparable laboratories overseas. While all of this time need not be spent in the laboratory, the trainee should be recognised as training substantially in respiratory physiology for this period by the director of the training laboratory, who should be qualified according to these guidelines and, in most cases, be a specialist respiratory physician. A program should be prospectively planned with a suitable director as supervisor. The two year period may include short periods of core advanced training, the third year of non-core training, and work towards a higher degree on a physiological topic. The director of the training laboratory must be satisfied that the prospective program will provide adequate experience over the two year program, which may be undertaken part time but would normally be completed within five years.

Adequate training to report respiratory function tests would be expected to be acquired during all respiratory advanced training programs. It is the responsibility of the Director to ensure that practitioners reporting studies from his/her laboratory are competent to do so.

Competency

The Director should be familiar with all the respiratory function testing equipment and be knowledgeable about normal and abnormal cardiorespiratory physiology. This should be combined with clinical experience in order to evaluate the significance of laboratory findings in relation to patient care. A working knowledge of medical instrumentation, electronics, computer utilisation and statistics is highly desirable.

Responsibilities

1. The Director, when employed by a hospital, is accountable to the hospital administration and professional staff. When working in the private non-hospital setting, accountability will depend on the particular circumstances of the work. It is the Director's responsibility to bring the laboratory to an overall standard that would qualify for accreditation by the Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand.
2. The Director will have the overall responsibility for the appointment, supervision, training and evaluation of staff who are assigned to work in the respiratory function laboratory. It is expected that many of these functions will be delegated to the senior scientific staff members of the laboratory.
3. The Director will be responsible, with the senior scientific staff, for the development of a manual detailing the work of the laboratory in accordance with the generally accepted professional and hospital standards required for accreditation by the Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand. Additional accreditation may be required from other authorities regarding pathology tests such as blood gas measurements. The Director will ensure that quality control and infection control systems exist and that appropriate records are maintained.
4. The Director should keep under constant review the appropriateness of the patient referrals for respiratory function studies. Where there is a significant risk to the patient, the study must be carried out under the supervision of the Director or a medically qualified designee. It is the responsibility of the Director to ensure that potentially hazardous procedures are appropriately recognised and that corrective measures are properly planned and taken when necessary. Protocols must be established to delineate responsibilities in such cases. It is advisable that the Director's office be located near the laboratory and that a part of each working day be spent in the area.
5. The Director will have overall responsibility for the accurate interpretation of the results of all respiratory function studies which must be promptly communicated to the referring practitioner.
6. The Director has the overall responsibility for the financial aspects of the running of the respiratory function laboratory.

7. The Director must maintain a continuing interest in developments in the field of respiratory function testing and should be advised by the senior scientific staff of new equipment and devices. It is the responsibility of the Director to ensure that the respiratory function laboratory techniques and equipment are upgraded when necessary to maintain standards of accuracy and cost effectiveness, and to introduce useful innovations.
8. The Director must maintain affiliation with professional organisations and attend appropriate meetings to ensure continuing education in respiratory function, respiratory medicine and physiology. It is the responsibility of the Director to serve as a continuing education resource to the hospital staff and to those employed within the department. Liaison with other directors and relevant experts outside the field, such as biomedical engineers and statisticians, is important to help ensure the high quality of performance of the laboratory.
9. The Director should participate in public and patient education and should serve as a resource to the community for improving public knowledge.

***This statement is a revision of the March 1996 statement by I H Young, D R Hillman and A Crockett for the Professional Standards Subcommittee, November 2000.**