

Breathe In... Breathe Out

by Holly HARVEY



When you think of respiratory issues, you may think of wheezing, coughing or even asthma. You may not picture a newborn being born in the front seat of a car and in respiratory distress.

For Araceli Solis, the Respiratory Care Program director at Collin College, it was just one of many unusual respiratory cases that she faced as respiratory care therapist.

"A woman was giving birth in the front seat of a car right in front of the hospital. The baby wasn't breathing and its heart rate was dropping," Solis recalled. "I had to work with the hospital team to get the baby breathing again in 40 degree weather. We were able to save the baby. After a short stint in the Intensive Care Unit, the new family was able to go home."

While not every situation is a life or death crisis, students in Collin College's respiratory care program are trained and prepared for every type of respiratory issue.

"The program covers everything from cradle-to-grave care," Solis said. "The students learn everything about newborns in distress to cardiopulmonary issues affecting the elderly."

Respiratory care is a fast-paced intensive program that teaches and certifies students in various competencies and provides hands-on training through clinical rotations and simulation laboratories.

Kristen Hood is a graduate of Collin College's respiratory care program and is now a respiratory care therapist and educator who works with children with breathing issues

and diseases at Children's Medical Center in Dallas. She also educates more than 140 therapists at the hospital on equipment, treatment and more.

"All of the hands-on experiences and training that Collin College provided really empowered me to now have confidence in my job," Hood said. "The program was so rigorous—within eight weeks I was getting actual training in clinical rotations working with patients."

Respiratory care involves students learning about breathing techniques, oxygenation and how to use various pieces of equipment. The two-year program generally accepts around 20 students who go from learning in the classroom with mannequins to shadowing and working in local hospitals.

"A big part of the program is the development of critical thinking skills," Solis said. "We want them to work on their skills in the lab and make their mistakes there so they're



fully prepared to perform well in the working world."

Hood started attending Collin College at 16, unsure of her future path.

"I didn't even know what a respiratory therapist was," Hood said. "But through Collin College I was able to shadow a respiratory therapist and

see what it actually entailed and I knew this is exactly what I wanted to do. And the passion of my professors in the classroom excited me and made me want to learn. There was so much to learn and the professors really covered the material well."

Collin College's Respiratory Care



Program was recognized with the Distinguished Registered Respiratory Therapist Credentialing Success Award from the Commission on

Accreditation for Respiratory Care for the third year in a row. Only 62 of the nation's 438 programs achieved the distinction and Collin College is one of

just six programs in the state of Texas to receive this honor.

In addition to extensive training, faculty and staff are committed to helping students once they leave the classroom as well.

"We never give up trying to get them a job," Solis said. "Last year, we reached 90 percent placement in just six weeks after graduation."

Collin College has an overall 94 percent job placement rate for the 2014 graduating class for respiratory care therapists. Careers for respiratory care therapists are projected to grow 19 percent from 2012 through 2020, according to the Department of Labor.

Hood says she wakes up excited every day to go to work and share her life-saving knowledge gained from Collin College.

"If I didn't have a community college like Collin to go to, college would not have even been an option for me," Hood said. "If you're weighing Collin College against something else, I think Collin is the clear choice."

For more information about the respiratory care program, visit www.collin.edu/rcp/. ❖

Holly Harvey is a public relations writer at Collin College.

Photos: Nick Young, Collin College.