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## A guide for respiratory physiotherapy postgraduate education - Presentation of the Harmonised Curriculum

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Complete List of Authors:	<p>Troosters, Thierry; University of Leuven, Department of Rehabilitation Sciences</p> <p>Tabin, Nathalie; European Respiratory Society,</p> <p>Langer, Daniel; KU Leuven, Faculty of Kinesiology and Rehabilitation; University Hospital / KU Leuven</p> <p>Burtin, Chris; Universiteit Hasselt, Faculty of Rehabilitation Sciences, Rehabilitation Research Centre</p> <p>Chatwin, Michelle; Royal Brompton Hospital, Department of Sleep and Ventilation</p> <p>Clini, Enrico; University of Modena, University Hospital of Modena Policlinico</p> <p>Emtner, Margareta; Uppsala University, Dep of Respiratory Medicine</p> <p>Gosselink, Rik; KU Leuven, Faculty of Kinesiology and Rehabilitation Sciences; University Hospitals KU Leuven, Respiratory Rehabilitation and Respiratory Division</p> <p>Grant, Kathleen; CHUV, Physiotherapy</p> <p>Inal-Ince, Deniz; Hacettepe University, School of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation</p> <p>Lewko, Agnieszka; Kingston University and St Georges University of London, Rehabilitation Sciences</p> <p>Main, Eleanor; University College London Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health Library</p> <p>Oberwaldner, Beatrice; Medizinische Universität Graz, Postgraduate school</p> <p>Pitta, Fabio; Universidade Estadual da Londrina Hospital Universitario da UEL, Department of Physiotherapy, Laboratory of Research in Respiratory Physiotherapy</p>
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## **A guide for respiratory physiotherapy postgraduate education - Presentation of the Harmonised Curriculum**

Troosters T<sup>1</sup>, Langer D<sup>1</sup>, Burtin C<sup>2</sup>, Chatwin M<sup>3</sup>, Clini E<sup>4</sup>, Emtner M<sup>5</sup>, Gosselink R<sup>1</sup>, Grant K<sup>6</sup>, Inal-Ince D<sup>7</sup>, Lewko A<sup>8</sup>, Main E<sup>9</sup>, Oberwaldner B<sup>10</sup>, Tabin N<sup>11</sup>, Pitta F<sup>12</sup>

1 Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, KU Leuven, Leuven Belgium

2 Reval Rehabilitation Research Center, BIOMED Biomedical Research Institute, Faculty of Rehabilitation, Hasselt University, Diepenbeek, Belgium

3 Academic and Clinical Department of Sleep and Breathing and NIHR Respiratory Biomedical Research Unit, Royal Brompton & Harefield NHS Foundation Trust, Sydney Street, London, United Kingdom.

4 Department Medical and Surgical Sciences University of Modena Reggio Emilia and University Hospital of Modena Policlinico, Modena, Italy.

5 Departments of Neuroscience and Medical Sciences, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden.

6 Department of Cardio-respiratory Physiotherapy, Vaud University Hospital, Lausanne, Switzerland.

7 Department of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation, Faculty of Health Sciences, Hacettepe University, Ankara Turkey.

8 Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education. Kingston University and St. George's University of London, United Kingdom.

9 Physiotherapy department, Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, University College London, WC1N 1EH, United Kingdom. 10 Postgraduate School, Medical University, Graz, Austria.

11 Education department, European Respiratory Society, Lausanne, Switzerland

12 Department of Physiotherapy, Laboratory of Research in Respiratory Physiotherapy (LFIP) State University of Londrina (UEL) Londrina Brazil.

### **Corresponding author**

Prof Thierry Troosters

UZ Gasthuisberg, Respiratory Division, Research and Development Building 1 Box 706

Herestraat49, 3000 Leuven

[Thierry.troosters@kuleuven.be](mailto:Thierry.troosters@kuleuven.be) Tel +32 16 330798

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2 Harmonising education is one of the most important challenges to ensure mobility of health  
3 care professionals across countries and regions of the world. While patients are affected by  
4 the same diseases, the health care systems in which they are cared for are very different and  
5 the health care providers within these systems are trained very differently. Health education  
6 in many countries is largely based on tradition. This is true for most medical specialities, as  
7 well as for physical therapy education [1], including respiratory physiotherapy. The  
8 responsibilities and the degree of professional and academic training vary widely across  
9 countries and regions [2]. While all educational programmes are likely fit for purpose within  
10 a given health care system, the variability in knowledge, skills, and attitudes makes mobility  
11 and cross-certification difficult, if not impossible. In addition the growing body of evidence  
12 for respiratory physiotherapy [3] makes it all the more important to foresee a framework for  
13 postgraduate training that prepares the workforce for the future [4]. For a global  
14 organization such as the European Respiratory Society (ERS), it also challenging to design  
15 postgraduate education that matches the level of knowledge and skills of all members. The  
16 ERS has a long tradition of providing such frameworks for harmonised education and training  
17 in respiratory medicine [5]. Figure 1 provides an overview of all available curricula and  
18 certified training programmes.

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34 The design of a European (or global) curriculum for respiratory physiotherapy provides a  
35 platform for educational tracks in order to match specific educational programmes to the  
36 current consensus of what is expected from a trained respiratory physiotherapist. It also  
37 makes suggestions as to how the knowledge, skills and attitudes can be obtained and at  
38 which level they should be examined. Importantly, this curriculum also provides third parties  
39 (chest physicians, general practitioners, nurses, thoracic surgeons, intensivists, funders and  
40 patients) with a comprehensive description of what they can expect from a trained  
41 respiratory physiotherapist.  
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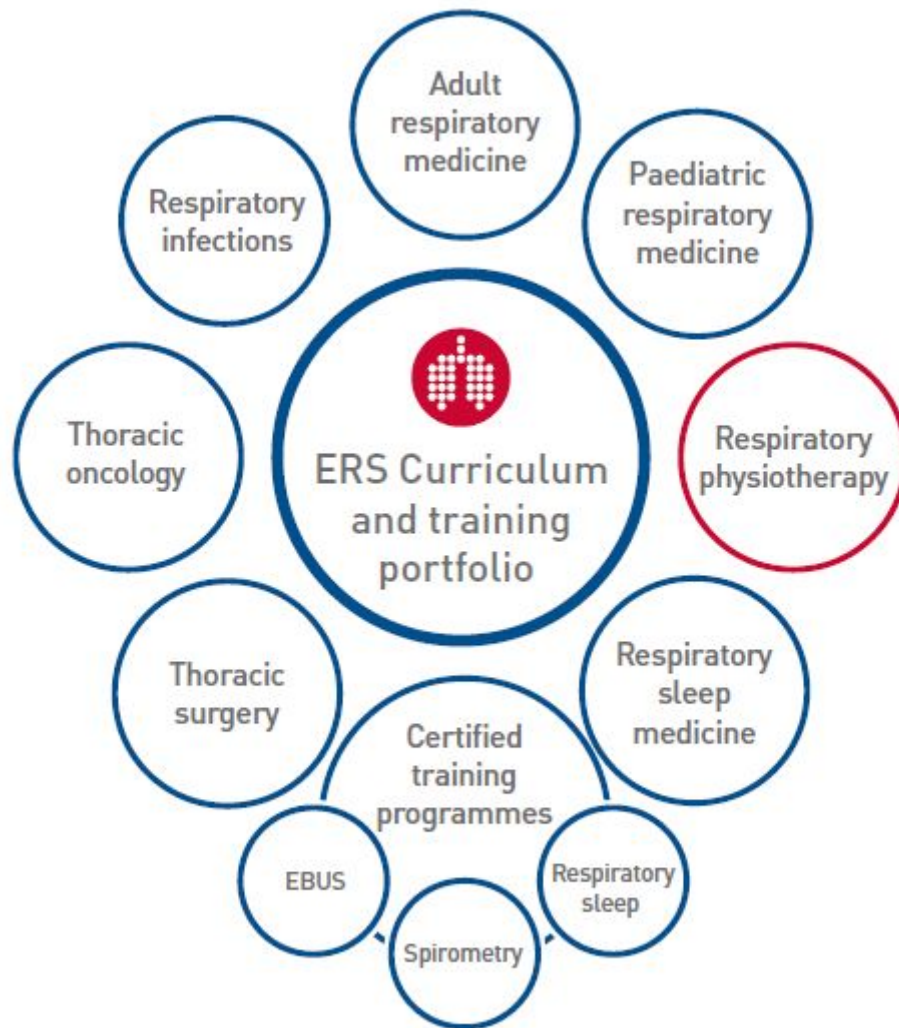


Figure 1: Overview of the portfolio of curricula and certified training programmes which have been developed by the ERS or are underway. See <https://www.ersnet.org/professional-development/ers-curriculum-design-a-summary-of-projects> for more information and relevant publications.

Physiotherapy is becoming more and more specialised. In several countries respiratory physiotherapy is a recognised subspecialty of physiotherapy. In Belgium, for example, six particular competencies are recognized today [6] and the list is growing. These include for example a particular competency in manual therapy, paediatric conditions, and respiratory physiotherapy. In the US, nine specialties are recognized by the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA). It is therefore no surprise that other branches of physical therapy have undertaken similar efforts to provide a standard set of expected knowledge, skills, and

1 attitudes. In the speciality of Orthopaedic Manipulative Therapy such a curriculum (or  
2 standard) exists since 1977 [7]. The APTA recognizes a 'cardiopulmonary physical therapist',  
3 and has a residency programme in accredited centres [8] as well as a formal exam for  
4 accreditation as a cardiorespiratory physical therapists.  
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12 The ERS Respiratory Physiotherapy curriculum sets a new standard for post-graduate  
13 respiratory physiotherapy education. It was developed to promote evidence based practice  
14 and physical skills for the respiratory physiotherapist, but also incorporates the expectations  
15 of other health care professionals who were involved in the development. The syllabus and  
16 curriculum are tailored to the needs of physical therapists that completed their physical  
17 therapy training (or training in rehabilitation sciences) according to the standards set out by  
18 the World Confederation of Physical Therapy (WCPT) [9]. This is important as it is expected  
19 that all respiratory physiotherapists should comply with the general professional attitudes  
20 required from a trained physiotherapist at entry level. These attitudes encompass  
21 accountability, humanity compassion/caring, cultural competence, ethical behaviour,  
22 integrity, personal and professional development, professional duty, social responsibility and  
23 advocacy, and teamwork [9].  
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35 Admittedly, the curriculum developed by the task force sets the bar high, both in terms of  
36 knowledge needs, as well as with regards to the skills and attitudes required from a  
37 professional. Conscious of the high standards, the curriculum is modular, with a separate  
38 adult and paediatric track, and additional modules for intensive care. This choice was made  
39 in order to accommodate the clinical reality of subspecialized professionals who are  
40 oftentimes dealing with very specific patient populations and those that may only treat  
41 adults or paediatrics.  
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49 Respiratory physiotherapists are professionals who collaborate within multidisciplinary  
50 teams and the success of their actions is often measured by the success of the whole team.  
51 The developed curriculum fits nicely with the 'description of physical therapy' provided by  
52 the World Confederation of Physical Therapy. This description highlights the competences of  
53 the physiotherapist in 1) undertaking and evaluating the findings of examinations and  
54 assessments, 2) formulating a diagnosis, prognosis and treatment plan within their field of  
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2 expertise, 3) providing consultation and determining when clients need to be referred to  
3 another professional, 4) implementing a physical therapy intervention, 5) determining the  
4 outcomes for such an intervention and 6) making recommendations for self-management  
5 (Description of Physical Therapy WCPT 2017).  
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12 The present curriculum contains not only items that need to be 'known' by respiratory  
13 physiotherapists, but, also includes the skills and attitudes that can be expected from  
14 respiratory physiotherapists. In addition, suggested forms of teaching as well as methods for  
15 assessment are proposed. Though recognisably difficult, whenever possible suggestions are  
16 made for minimal clinical training or exposure. This may prove to be the 'weak spot' of the  
17 present curriculum. While it is clear that clinical exposure is necessary to provide proper  
18 patient care, the exact quantity of that exposure is variable and hard to grasp. Nevertheless,  
19 whenever possible, based on educational experience and validated by the expert reviewers,  
20 a best guess was made for relevant clinical exposure. As it stands now, the proposed  
21 curriculum provides educators with a blueprint for teaching, skills training and practical  
22 training.  
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33 The curriculum is broad and spans the areas previously laid out in the syllabus [2]. The latter  
34 was developed with direct input from a large panel of worldwide experts. Similarly, both the  
35 adult and paediatric tracks of the curriculum have been subject to peer review to ensure  
36 acceptability and credibility. Upon publication, members of the European Respiratory  
37 Society will be able to provide input to the curriculum as it is seen as a dynamic document  
38 that can, and should, be adapted over time.  
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45 In the document, all aspects of respiratory therapy are included. This does not mean that it  
46 is exclusivity for respiratory physiotherapists. In different countries several health care  
47 professionals may have specific competencies. For example, this is true for exercise training,  
48 non-invasive mechanical ventilation or mechanical ventilation. It is therefore important to  
49 align the local/regional requirements and local legal arrangements. In any case,  
50 physiotherapists have the competences to set-up fruitful interdisciplinary collaborations and  
51 this is also made clear throughout the document.  
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2 The next steps are now to compare the content of the curriculum with existing educational  
3 programmes in different countries and to then subsequently align the educational  
4 opportunities of the European Respiratory Society with the curriculum and establish  
5 accredited centres where practical skills training as well as clinical training can be performed.  
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7 Leadership of the European Respiratory Society Group 9.2 (Physiotherapy) is committed to  
8 set out a path towards implementation and acceptance of the curriculum so that it can  
9 become an international standard for training in respiratory physiotherapy. Since  
10 accreditation of physiotherapists (as it is with other health care specialists) is organised at a  
11 country level, the ambition of ERS is not to provide a certificate for accreditation. Rather, the  
12 idea is to organise modules that individual members can use as part of their own portfolio to  
13 seek recognition as a respiratory physiotherapy specialist within their own accreditation  
14 environment, or an environment they wish to transfer to as part of health care  
15 professionals' mobility.  
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26 The current syllabus and curriculum will provide a framework for international training in  
27 respiratory physiotherapy. It advises what knowledge, skills and attitudes need to be  
28 mastered by a respiratory physiotherapist. It also provides an indication for clinical training  
29 time, different forms of learning and examination. The syllabus and curriculum contain the  
30 elements around which an E-portfolio can be built and it sets out a benchmark for  
31 endorsement of educational opportunities organized by others as well as the ERS. The  
32 expert group now invites the respiratory physiotherapy community to verify the proposed  
33 curriculum against their own. As this is a dynamic document, feedback is surely welcome.  
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35 Further, within the Scientific Group 9.2 (Physiotherapy) this project is now managed in order  
36 to exploit the curriculum to the benefit of all its members.  
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