

Improving the quality of diagnostic spirometry in adults: the National Register of certified professionals and operators¹

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is it important to have a system of competency assessment and certification?

Spirometry is the main investigation for diagnosing respiratory diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma and a range of other respiratory conditions. It is provided in a variety of settings: general practice and community services as well as secondary care and workplace surveillance.

Spirometry needs to be performed accurately to ensure that patients are both diagnosed and monitored safely and effectively. This includes not just the technical skills to do spirometry tests but also the knowledge and understanding required to interpret the results of those tests. Whatever the local service model, whoever performs and/or interprets spirometry must be appropriately certified as competent and follow the recommended standards for quality assured spirometry.

This sounds like a lot of red tape – how will it improve the quality of spirometry?

Having a system of competency assessment and certification will ensure that everyone - commissioners, individual healthcare professionals and patients are clear about the diagnostic standards required and can be assured that healthcare staff performing and/or interpreting diagnostic spirometry hold a valid, current certificate of competence.

I have been performing diagnostic spirometry for over 10 years – do I need to undergo training in order to register?

¹ See <http://www.pcc-cic.org.uk/article/quality-assured-diagnostic-spirometry>

Not necessarily – the Experienced Practitioner Scheme enables experienced individuals to undertake an assessment of competence without attending any specific training. See <http://www.artp.org.uk/en/spirometry/exp-pract-scheme.cfm>

Do I have to attend training at an ARTP accredited provider?

No – but be aware that only ARTP accredited providers can undertake competency assessments.

I am an experienced practitioner but don't get much opportunity to practice at work, so I need to update my knowledge and skills. Are refresher training courses available?

Yes – see <http://www.artp.org.uk/en/spirometry/refresher-course.cfm>

Is e-learning available?

Yes – the ARTP offers an on line course “Spirometry in Practice” leading to the Full or Foundation certificate in Spirometry (dependent on modules completed). See <http://www.artp.org.uk/en/events/courses/spirometry>. Education for Health also offers modules that are blended learning with eLearning and study days, see www.educationforhealth.org/spirometry

Where do I find a list of ARTP accredited training providers? And how much does training cost?

A range of training providers offer ARTP approved training courses leading to certification. Training costs vary according to competency level –available courses, costs and training centres can be found at <http://www.artp.org.uk/en/spirometry/current-courses.cfm> and <https://www.educationforhealth.org/education/courses/spirometry/>

When will the new system be implemented?

To allow sufficient time for the necessary training, assessment and certification infrastructure to be set up, it is proposed to phase the implementation of the recommendations over the four years 1 April 2017 – 31 March 2021.

Healthcare professionals currently performing and interpreting spirometry will have until 31 March 2021 to ensure they have been assessed and entered on to the National Register of certified healthcare professionals.

I am already on the Register. What do I need to do?

There's no need for you to do anything at this stage. Those already registered as at 1 April 2017 will be transferred to the appropriate part of the new National Register (Foundation, Full or Interpretation Only), and will remain on it for 3 years, following which re-certification will be required (see below).

Does this mean that everyone on the register when it transfers on 1st April 2017 will all be changed to 3-year reaccreditation date?

Yes

What do I have to do in order to re-certify to remain on The National Register?

The recertification process is outlined on the ARTP website for both new and existing members of the register – see www.artp.org.uk/en/spirometry/reaccreditation.cfm

What is The National Register?

To assure everyone that those undertaking spirometry assessments and interpretation have achieved the required standard of practice, the ARTP will maintain an up-to-date national register (referred to as The National Register) of certified healthcare professionals and operators.

Once certified as competent, all those performing and/or interpreting diagnostic spirometry will be required to record their qualification on the National Register.

The Register will list individuals' names according to whichever of three categories of certification that person has achieved: Foundation (=Performing Only), Full (=Performing and interpretation) or Interpretation Only. It will also indicate the date when certification was obtained.

What does the assessment of competence actually involve?

See the document “Improving the quality of diagnostic spirometry in adults: The National Register of certified professional and operators” at <https://www.pcc-cic.org.uk/article/quality-assured-diagnostic-spirometry>

What training courses are available in my area?

All of the ARTP approved training courses, dates and locations can be found at <http://www.artp.org.uk/en/spirometry/current-courses.cfm> and www.educationforhealth.org/spirometry

How do I get on The National Register if I don't have training?

If you have been performing high quality spirometry for a long time, you may be eligible to apply for the Experienced Practitioner Scheme. This enables experienced individuals to undertake an assessment of competence without having undertaken any specific training. See <http://www.artp.org.uk/en/spirometry/exp-pract-scheme.cfm>

Do I have to be on a professional or statutory register to obtain a spirometry competency certificate?

No, you do not have to be on a professional or statutory register to undertake the certificate of competency. However, you must complete all of the required parts to obtain the awards.

Spirometry is different in children – does this cover both adults and children?

No – the competency assessment framework applies only to adults i.e. those aged 16+.

Does this apply just to primary care or also to other healthcare professionals?

The competency levels set out “Improving the quality of diagnostic spirometry in adults: The National Register of certified professional and operators” apply to people from a wide range of professional backgrounds. This includes, but is not limited to, physiologists Band 2-4 (e.g. respiratory physiologists, cardiac physiologists, exercise physiologists), physiotherapists, research staff as well as primary care nurses and doctors.

If we need to train up our practice nurse, who will pay for the training course?

This may vary by locality. In some areas the cost of training will be borne by the practice or Trust; in others it may be covered by another organisation, such as CCG, or Academic health science network. You will need to check on local arrangements.

If we don't want to train someone up in our practice, what are our other options to ensure that our patients have access to diagnostic spirometry?

The document is not prescriptive about the setting in which spirometry takes place, and it is recognised that providing a good diagnostic spirometry service may take different forms in different places. If you don't have anyone certified in your practice to provide spirometry, other models of provision can be explored locally.

Is there a separate charge for the assessment at each competency level?

The assessment charge is dependent on the route taken. If no training is required, then registration through the ARTP costs £200 for the assessment elements only and this includes a copy of the ARTP Spirometry Handbook. However, if someone is experienced it is cheaper to use the Experienced Practitioner route which costs £150 and takes place at the workplace.

For those needing training, at Education for Health the assessment is integral to the module and costs approximately £580, this includes inclusion on the National Register following successful completion of the assessment. This is comparable with the ARTP training, where two days training is needed alongside the registration fee. With the ARTP this two day training is delivered by accredited training centres who charge a centre specific fee, which when added to the registration fee, gives a total cost of approximately £450-£500.

Once certified, how much will it cost to register my qualification? And how long does my certification last?

For both Education for Health and the ARTP this cost is included in the registration fee. Certification lasts for 3 years.

If our practitioners have completed training locally will this be recognized for entry on to The National Register?

Yes – but only if the assessment of competence has been undertaken by an ARTP accredited training centre, which carries out assessment to the standards agreed at national level.

I am a GP who diagnoses respiratory conditions after colleagues have undertaken spirometry and interpreted it. Do I need to attend any training?

No, assuming that the persons performing and interpreting spirometry in your practice are registered appropriately. There is an interpretation only part of the register which GPs can be placed on by submitting a ‘mini’ portfolio of traces that have been interpreted (£95). This assessment has been set at national level. This can also be undertaken as part of a one-day workshop (£200) which includes the assessment fee, advice on what the assessment entails as well as training around interpretation.

I am a practice nurse who has attended a one-day course on performing spirometry – will I have to go on a training course?

Competency can only be assessed by observing. You will therefore have to demonstrate your competence to perform spirometry with a practical assessment and your competency to undertake or interpret spirometry via a portfolio. As a nurse you need to assess your own need for training and decide whether you need further training or can have your skills assessed via the Experienced Practitioner Scheme. The latter will assess your competence in your own workplace via a practical assessment and review of your most recent spirometry tests, ensuring all processes such as patient safety, calibration, verification and cleaning are in place.

I am already on the National Register – after going on a spirometry training course a couple of years ago. How will this affect me?

As you are already on the Register you will need to reaccredit 3 years after your initial placement on the register and every 3 years thereafter.

I have been doing spirometry for years. If my name is not on the National Register, will I be able to continue doing spirometry?

It is expected that from March 31 2021, only those on the National Register will be performing and/or interpreting diagnostic spirometry. You could apply to be assessed under the Experienced Practitioner Scheme in order to join the National Register.

Can I undertake any training in order to join the National Register or can I only take training from certain organisations?

You can attend any training provider providing high quality training in diagnostic spirometry. ARTP accredited courses have assessment and certification included as an integral part of the course. You should check what is included before you undertake a training course.

If you have training that is not accredited, you would need to apply separately to be assessed and certified in order to join the National Register. As competency can only be assessed by observing, you would have to demonstrate your competence to perform spirometry with a practical assessment and your competency to undertake or interpret spirometry via portfolio

I have been interpreting spirometry for many years and it would be a waste of time for me to attend training, but a refresher course could be useful. What options do I have?

If your role is purely interpretation and you do not perform spirometry you may wish to consider a one-day interpretation workshop. This explains what is involved in the competency assessment, and offers the opportunity to submit work for the assessment within 6 months. Successful completion of the assessment element (=portfolio of interpretation) leads to a place on the interpretation part of the National Register.

The Experienced Practitioner Scheme (see <http://www.artp.org.uk/en/spirometry/exp-pract-scheme.cfm>) is designed to provide an opportunity for experienced healthcare professionals to have their competence assessed without undertaking any training. If you are deemed competent in interpreting spirometry, you can join the National register.

What about the other nations? Why is this only England?

NHS England sponsored the work that led to the publication in 2013 of 'A Guide to performing quality assured diagnostic spirometry' and have been closely involved in the development of the competency assessment framework document. However, their remit does not extend beyond England, so this scheme only applies to healthcare practitioners working in England.

What will it cost me to achieve certification through the Experienced Practitioner Scheme?

The cost is currently £150, which includes a visit to your practice to assess you and registration on the appropriate part of the register if successful. However, if training is recommended as the required standard is not met then this will be at an additional cost.

What will it cost for me to go on a training course, be assessed and get onto the National Register?

Depending on competency level the cost is currently about £400-£600 and will take up to 6 months of study dependant on prior experience.

Why do we need a National Register – the current system seems to work fine?

There is evidence² that the current system is leading to misdiagnosis and missed diagnosis in many patients. This should not be allowed to continue. The ARTP register has been in existence since 2006 and this is now a formalisation of this process similar to that undertaken with cytology sampling.

Who is the interpretation workshop aimed at?

This was designed for those who are undertaking spirometry interpretation but who have no role in performing the test and no responsibility for the equipment i.e. cleaning, verification etc.

Why is there no practical assessment for the interpretation part of the register?

As the person undertaking the interpretation of the test is not deemed competent to perform spirometry there is no practical assessment. This part of the register is purely for those who wish to interpret and this is the area where competence will be assessed.

² See **Time to take a breath** National Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) Audit Programme: National primary care audit (Wales) 2014–2015 <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/primary-care-time-take-breath>

If I have undertaken the performing module and have a place on the foundation part of the National Register (competent to perform) can I ‘top up’ to a place on the full part of the Register by passing the interpretation workshop portfolio?

Assuming you have maintained and revalidated your place on the foundation register you can undertake the interpretation module and have a place on the Full register. This would then supersede your place on the foundation register which would lapse with time.

I have been doing spirometry for many years and do not feel I need training to get onto the register. Is there another route?

Assuming you have all the processes and protocols in place and can demonstrate these to an ARTP assessor you can apply to go through the Experienced Practitioner Scheme (EPS). A visit to your work place will be arranged and you will be assessed there. If you are unsuccessful, training will be recommended. Information about the EPS can be found at:

<http://www.artp.org.uk/en/spirometry/exp-pract-scheme.cfm>

