

Asthma affects adults and children of all ages. A certified asthma educator can enhance an individual's understanding of treating and managing their disease, even those who have been managing their asthma for years. The Asthma Educator Specialist examination measures comprehensive knowledge of asthma pathophysiology and management, including developmental theories, cultural dimensions, the impact of chronic illness, and teaching-learning principles.

The examination is a multidisciplinary program available for currently licensed or credentialed professionals who have proven their dedication to excellence with a current, active, unrestricted license or credential from the United States in one of the following disciplines: physician (MD, DO), physician assistant (PA-C), nurse (RN, LPN, NP), respiratory therapist (RRT, CRT), pulmonary function technologist (RPFT, CPFT), pharmacist (RPh), social worker (CSW), health educator (CHES), physical therapist (PT), occupational therapist (OT), emergency medical technician (EMT, AEMT) or paramedic. You can also sit for the examination if you have at least 1,000 hours of direct patient asthma education, counseling or coordinating services before applying. The examination contains 175 multiple-choice items (150 scored and 25 pretest) and you will be given 3.5 hours to complete it.

Joyce A. Baker, MBA, RRT, RRT-NPS, AE-C, FAARC, an inpatient asthma care coordinator, knows firsthand how vital the AE-C credential can be. She says, "My AE-C credential allows me to be an extension of the medical team by serving as an asthma consultant to the healthcare team, and it elevates patients, caregivers, community partners, and providers' level of confidence in me as a content expert. Being a certified asthma educator helps me to:

- Assess clinical and social barriers to care, patients' compliance with their daily care plan, and factors contributing to poor medication adherence affecting higher healthcare utilization or the need for oral steroids.
- Advocate for the individual patient and their caregivers to establish the best treatment plan that best aligns with social situations, personal preferences, healthcare access and health insurance formulary.
- Educate patients and their caregivers by speaking to them about where they are in their current understanding, then providing additional information and instructions about their disease and how to best manage it outside of the hospital utilizing patient-centered goals.
- Collaborate with community partners (school nurses, primary care providers and community health workers) to support care transitions from the hospital to the community. Working in tandem with these partners to identify ways to improve the quality of life for children with asthma to help decrease unplanned healthcare utilization."

As a respiratory therapist like Kellie R. Carroll, MPA, RRT, RRT-NPS, AE-C, who works in all units within a children's hospital, the AE-C credential provides valuable knowledge she applies during every shift. The asthma pathophysiology and management fundamentals taught in RT programs provide a solid foundation for becoming a certified asthma educator.

Kellie says, "By studying for the AE-C examination, I learned more about asthma from a multidisciplinary view and expanded my understanding of patient education and asthma self-management. Some of this information was also helpful in managing my health as a patient with asthma. The continuing education requirements to maintain this credential keep my knowledge up to date about new guidelines and medications, which enhances the patient care and education I provide in the emergency department, general care areas and ICUs."