5.1: Respiratory Introduction

Learning Objectives

- Identify the classifications and actions of respiratory system drugs
- Give examples of when, how, and to whom respiratory system drugs may be administered
- Identify the side effects and special considerations associated with respiratory system drugs
- Include considerations and implications of using respiratory system drugs across the lifespan
- Include evidence-based concepts when using the nursing process related to medications that affect the respiratory system
- Identify and interpret related laboratory tests

Every year millions of Americans visit their health care provider for respiratory diseases such as allergies, asthma, bronchitis, common cold, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and pneumonia.

Currently more than 25 million people in the United States have asthma. Approximately 14.8 million adults have been diagnosed with COPD, and approximately 12 million people have not yet been diagnosed. The burden of respiratory diseases affects individuals and their families, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, cities, and states. Because of the cost to the health care system, the burden of respiratory diseases also falls on society; it is paid for with tax dollars, higher health insurance rates, and lost productivity. Annual health care expenditures for asthma alone are estimated at $20.7 billion.¹

Before we learn about medications that are used to treat respiratory conditions in our patients, let’s review the respiratory system.

¹ This work is a derivative of Respiratory Diseases by Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion in the