



Physical Therapist

Education

The minimum educational requirement is a post-baccalaureate degree from an accredited physical therapist education program. While some programs offer a master's degree, the large majority of programs offer the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) degree. Currently, 199 colleges and universities nationwide offer professional physical therapist education programs; 87.5% offer the DPT and the remaining programs are planning to convert. (www.apta.org)

Certifications

Physical Therapists (PTs) pass a national examination (NPTE) given in 53 jurisdictions – the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. PTs are licensed and are governed by the practice act from the state in which they practice. (www.fsbpt.org).

Physical therapy practitioners may also be board certified in a specialty area through the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties (ABPTS). There are seven specialty areas: Cardiovascular and Pulmonary (CCS), Clinical Electrophysiologic (ECS), Geriatric (GCS), Neurologic (NCS), Orthopedic (OCS), Pediatric (PCS) and Sports (SCS). <http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=ABPTS1>

Roles and functions

Physical therapists provide services to patients/clients who have impairments, functional limitations, disabilities, or changes in physical function and health status resulting from injury, disease or other causes. They are also involved in prevention; in promoting health, wellness and fitness; and in screening activities. The PT integrates the five elements of patient/client management—examination, evaluation, diagnosis, prognosis and intervention—in a manner to optimize patient outcomes.

Examples of the *prevention screening activities* in which PTs engage include:

- Identification of risk factors for neuromuscular injuries in the workplace
- Identification of children who may need an examination for idiopathic scoliosis
- Pre-performance testing of individuals who are active in sports

Examples of prevention activities and *health, wellness and fitness promotion activities* in which PTs engage include:

- Ergonomic redesign; strengthening, stretching, and endurance exercise programs; postural training to prevent job-related disabilities, including trauma and repetitive stress injuries.
- Exercise programs, gait training and balance and coordination activities to reduce the risk of falls—and the risk of fractures from falls—in older adults.
- Exercise programs and instruction in ADL (self-care, communication and mobility skills required for independence in daily living) and instrumental activities of daily living.

Examples of *categories of test and measures* that PTs may use during an examination include: aerobic capacity/endurance, gait, locomotion and balance; pain, range of motion including muscle length, motor function (including motor control and motor learning), arousal, attention and cognition; and joint integrity and mobility.

Examples of *interventions* that PTs may use as part of a plan of care include: patient/client related instruction, therapeutic exercise, functional training, manual therapy techniques (including mobilization/manipulation), airway clearance techniques, electrotherapeutic modalities and integrumentary repair and protection techniques. (*Guide*

to Physical Therapist Practice, 2nd ed. *Phys Ther* 2001; 81:9-744; APTA, Alexandria, VA)

Consumers have direct access to physical therapy services in 42 states. In the remaining states and jurisdictions, a physician referral or prescription is needed. Physical therapists recognize when patients demonstrate conditions, signs and symptoms that should be evaluated by other health care professionals before therapy is instituted. Physical therapists also recognize when it is appropriate to refer patients to other health care professionals for consultation. Physical Therapists consult, interact and practice with: physicians, dentists, nurses, educators, social workers, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and any other personnel involved with the patient/client. Administrator, researcher and educator are additional potential roles.

http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Resources_for_Chapters&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=18064

Practice settings

Physical therapists work with individuals of all ages in a variety of practice settings. These include but are not limited to: hospitals or subacute facilities, outpatient clinics or offices, rehabilitation centers, skilled nursing or assisted living facilities, industry or workplace, homes, schools, hospice, sports training /fitness facilities and education or research centers.

Professional association links for further info on the profession:

www.apta.org

Link to TJU education program:

<http://www.jefferson.edu/jchp/pt/>