Policy statement

Education

The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) recognises that the education of physical therapists takes place in very diverse social, economic and political environments throughout the world. Physical therapy education is a continuum of learning, beginning with admission to an accredited/recognised physical therapy school and ending with retirement from active practice.

The first professional qualification should be completion of a curriculum that qualifies the physical therapist for practice as an independent autonomous professional.\(^1\) Education for entry level physical therapists should be based on university or university level courses of at least four years. WCPT acknowledges that there is variation in programme delivery and in entry level qualifications, including Bachelors/Baccalaureate/Licensed or equivalent, Masters and Doctorate entry qualifications. It is expected that any programme, irrespective of its length and mode of delivery, should deliver a curriculum that will enable physical therapists to attain the knowledge, skills and attributes described in the guidelines for physical therapist professional entry level education.\(^1\)

The goal of physical therapy education is the continuing development of physical therapists and it should equip them to practise without limitation within the scope of practice defined in individual countries. Life-long learning and professional development are hallmarks of a competent physical therapist. Learning and development take place in a variety of ways. Physical therapists should be encouraged to undertake post-qualifying education in physical therapy or related fields that will advance their professional development.

WCPT encourages and supports national member organisations to:

- implement appropriate entry level educational standards (see WCPT guideline for physical therapist professional entry level education \(^1\)) and a curriculum that:
  - will enable physical therapists to attain the knowledge, skills and attributes described in the WCPT guidelines\(^1\)
  - is relevant to the health and social needs of the jurisdiction where physical therapy services are provided
- includes direct clinical experience under the supervision of appropriately qualified physical therapists or other relevant health professionals (as skills and experience increase this clinical education will involve access to gradually increasing levels of responsibility)
- equips physical therapists to practise in a variety of health care settings including (but not limited to) institutional, industrial, occupational, private clinics and primary health care, encompassing urban and rural communities
- prepares physical therapists, if possible, to practise in environments that reflect the health care/service delivery models that operate in different countries
- includes research methodology and skills to practise as evidence based practitioners
- is delivered by physical therapists and other appropriately qualified faculty members who:
  - are able to transfer knowledge and skills about physical therapist examination/assessment, evaluation, diagnosis, prognosis/plan of care, and interventions/treatment and their outcomes, including the critical analysis of theories and methods of physical therapy
  - have an awareness and understanding of the culture in which they are teaching
  - have appropriate education and/or credentials to teach basic and foundational sciences (e.g., anatomy, histology, physiology, imaging, pharmacology), behavioural and social sciences (e.g., psychology, ethics, sociology), movement sciences (e.g., kinesiology, biomechanics, exercise science) and research methodology
- develop accreditation/recognition processes that independently validate and assess the standards of entry level education provision to ensure they are of a standard that affords graduates full statutory and professional recognition to practice
- promote knowledge of educational approaches that will help physical therapists communicate, supervise, educate and transfer skills to others
- promote the use of a variety of approaches to assessment of learning linked to outcomes
- explore new clinically and cost effective means of facilitating and keeping a record of learning activities and their outcomes, capitalising on technological developments
Glossary

Accreditation — is a type of quality assurance process which utilises all aspects of review and assessment according to pre-defined standards. Accreditation may be applied to physical therapy education programmes or a programme of physical therapy delivery.³

Autonomy — is the ability of a reflective practitioner to make independent judgments; including the ability to initiate, provide services, alter physical therapy interventions or terminate services.⁴

Faculty — a department or group of related departments in a college or university and all the educators in a faculty of a college or university.⁵

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<th>Approval, review and related policy information</th>
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| **Date adopted:** | Originally adopted at the 13th General Meeting of WCPT June 1995.  
Revised and re-approved at the 15th General Meeting of WCPT June 2003.  
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| **Date for review:** | 2015 |
| **Related WCPT policies:** | WCPT policy statements:  
• Description of physical therapy  
• Regulation of the physical therapy profession  
WCPT guidelines:  
• Guideline for physical therapist professional entry level education  
• Guideline for the development of a system of legislation/regulation/recognition of physical therapists  
• Guideline for qualifications of faculty for physical therapist professional entry level programmes  
• Guideline for delivering quality continuing professional development for physical therapists  
• Guideline for the clinical education component of the physical therapist professional entry level programme |
References


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