Policy statement

Patients'/clients’ rights in physical therapy

The World Confederation for Physical Therapy advocates for:

- respect of a patient’s/client’s dignity, integrity and self-determination
- protection of the legal status of the patient/client in connection with the health system and the physical therapist
- patients'/clients’ rights to a relationship based on trust, reliability and confidentiality between them and the physical therapist

Physical therapists are subject to the national laws, regulations and professional standards of practice that govern the profession. They should also be aware of relevant international declarations and national laws in areas such as human rights, equal opportunity, racial and gender discrimination, privacy, freedom of information, workplace accidents and injuries.

WCPT calls on its member organisations to implement the rights set out below.

Patients’/clients’ right to quality physical therapy services

Patients/clients have the right to:

- physical therapy services without discrimination
- services provided by physical therapists who are free to make clinical and ethical judgments without outside interference
- services provided by physical therapists who are free to exercise professional judgment according to their education and experience
- request a second opinion from another physical therapist at any stage
- physical therapy services provided in accordance with their best interests
- choose freely and change their physical therapist or health service institution, whether in the private or public sector
- advocacy, if they are unable to speak on their own behalf
Patients'/clients' right to information

Patients/clients have the right to:

- information upon which to base the decision to consent or refuse examination/assessment and intervention/treatment
- decline examination/assessment and intervention/treatment at any stage, without it prejudicing future management
- receive information about themselves recorded in their health records
- receive information about practice policies, charges for services, physical therapy goals, desired outcomes and procedures
- choose who, if anyone, should be informed on their behalf
- discuss the physical therapy intervention/treatment options, benefits, risks and side effects
- receive information in a way that is comprehensible and appropriate to their values and cultural and religious beliefs
- receive information about complaints procedures
- complain and to have the complaint managed sensitively

Patients'/clients' right to informed consent

Patients/clients have the right to provide or withhold informed consent for the type and nature of physical therapy to be provided. Patients/clients need to participate in decisions about physical therapy interventions and make free decisions with knowledge of the consequences of their decisions. ¹

Patients/clients need to know:

- the purpose of any examination/assessment or intervention/treatment
- any risk associated with the proposed intervention/treatment
- the expected benefit of the intervention/treatment
- reasonable alternatives to the proposed intervention/treatment
- the implications of withholding consent

Patients'/clients' right to confidentiality

Patients/clients have the right to confidentiality. Any information related to health status, diagnosis, prognosis, interventions/treatment or any other personal information obtained from them should be kept in confidence unless explicit consent is given or the law specifically states otherwise.
Patients'/clients' right to access to data
Patients'_clients have the right to:
- have access to all information kept by the physical therapist relating to them
- be notified when their physical therapy data are transmitted to a data bank
- have incorrect data corrected or destroyed.\textsuperscript{2-3}

Patients'/clients' right to health education
Patients' clients have the right to health education that will assist them in making informed choices about their personal health, their health promotion, the health services available and the continuity of health services.

Patients'/clients' right to dignity
Patients' clients have the right to:
- be treated with dignity in all interactions with a physical therapist
- be treated courteously
- have their privacy respected at all times in all physical therapy services
- have their culture, values and religious beliefs respected
- die with dignity
- receive humane terminal care

Glossary

**Informed consent** — is a decision to participate in assessment, treatment or research, taken by a competent individual who has received the necessary information; who has adequately understood the information; and who, after considering the information, has arrived at a decision without having been subjected to coercion, undue influence or inducement, or intimidation. Informed consent is based on the principle that competent individuals are entitled to choose freely whether to participate in assessment, treatment or research. Informed consent protects the individual's freedom of choice and respects the individual's autonomy. In order to obtain the valid consent of patients for assessment, treatment or participation in research, they must be informed of all potential and significant risks, benefits and likely outcomes of treatment, taking into account their age, emotional state and cognitive ability, to allow valid/informed consent to be given.\textsuperscript{4-6}

**Standards of practice** — are a collection of documents describing the professional consensus on the practise of physical therapy for physical therapists working in any occupational setting. Standards reflect the collective judgement of the profession at a given point in time.\textsuperscript{7}
### Approval, review and related policy information

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| Related WCPT policies: | WCPT ethical principles  
WCPT policy statements:  
- Ethical responsibilities of physical therapists and WCPT members  
- Standards of physical therapy practice  
- Quality services  
- Informed consent  
- Records management: record keeping, storage, retrieval and disposal  
WCPT guidelines:  
- Guideline for standards of physical therapy practice  
- Guideline for records management: record keeping, storage, retrieval and disposal  
WCPT endorsements:  
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child  
- the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities |

### References


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