

## Autonomy

The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) believes that physical therapists, as autonomous professionals, should have the freedom to exercise their professional judgment and decision making, wherever they practice, within the physical therapist's knowledge, competence and scope of practice.

Physical therapists operate as independent practitioners, as well as members of health service provider teams, and are subject to the ethical principles of WCPT and the codes of ethics and best practice in the country in which they practise. They are able to act as first contact practitioners, and patients/clients may seek direct services without referral from another health professional.<sup>1</sup> The services provided by physical therapists encompass health promotion, prevention, examination/assessment, evaluation, interventions/treatments and outcomes assessment. The actions of individual physical therapists are their own responsibility, and their professional decisions cannot be controlled or compromised by employers, members of other professions or other individuals.

In addition to recognising the autonomy of the physical therapist, WCPT's Description of Physical Therapy states that ethical principles require a physical therapist to recognise the autonomy of the patient/client or legal guardian in seeking his or her services.<sup>1</sup>

WCPT encourages its member organisations to support and work toward:

- assurance that entry level physical therapist professional education requirements meet WCPT's guidelines<sup>2</sup>
- recognition by national governments and other professionals of physical therapists as autonomous professionals
- patients/clients having direct access to physical therapists and their services through self-referral
- implementation of procedures that support responsible self-governance of physical therapists<sup>3</sup>

## Glossary

**Autonomy** — is the ability of a reflective practitioner to make independent judgments; open to initiate, terminate, or alter physical therapy intervention. It means the responsibility of the professional to manage his/her practice independently and to act according to the rules of ethics and the code of professional conduct within a framework of health legislation. Professional autonomy is usually stated in the law, regulation, directives or rules governing the scope of practice.<sup>4, 5</sup>

1. Clinical autonomy: Responsibility of the practitioner to decide the programme of intervention and its modalities based on the diagnosis that he/she makes.<sup>4</sup>
2. Management autonomy: Responsibility of the professional to manage his/her practice independently.<sup>4</sup>
3. Professional autonomy: is usually stated in the law, regulation, directives or rules. It means the responsibility of the professional to make decisions regarding the management of a

patient/client based on one's own professional knowledge and expertise to manage his/her practice independently and to act according to the rules of ethics and the code of professional conduct within the framework of health legislation. <sup>4, 6</sup>

Approval, review and related policy information	
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<b>Date for review:</b>	2019
<b>Related WCPT policies:</b>	WCPT policy statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct access and patient/client self-referral to physical therapy</li> <li>• Relationships with other health professionals</li> <li>• Regulation of the physical therapy profession</li> <li>• Reciprocity – mutual recognition</li> </ul> WCPT guidelines: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guideline for physical therapist professional entry level education</li> <li>• Guideline for the development of a system of legislation/regulation/ recognition of physical therapists</li> </ul>

## References

1. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. Policy statement: Description of physical therapy. London, UK: WCPT; 2017. [www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-descriptionPT](http://www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-descriptionPT) (Access date 10th March 2017)
2. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. WCPT guideline for physical therapist professional entry level education. London, UK: WCPT; 2011. [www.wcpt.org/guidelines/entry-level-education](http://www.wcpt.org/guidelines/entry-level-education) (Access date 22nd September 2011)
3. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. Policy statement: Regulation of the physical therapy profession. London, UK: WCPT; 2017. [www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-regulation](http://www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-regulation) (Access date 10th March 2017)
4. American Physical Therapy Association. Normative Model of Physical Therapist Professional Education. Washington DC, USA: APTA; 2004. <http://www.apta.org/Educators/Curriculum/APTA/> (Access date 10th March 2017)
5. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. Policy statement: Autonomy. London, UK: WCPT; 2017. [www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-autonomy](http://www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-autonomy) (Access date 10th March 2017)
6. European Region of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy. European Physiotherapy Benchmark Statement. Brussels, Belgium: ER-WCPT; 2003. [http://www.erwcpt.eu/physiotherapy\\_and\\_practice/tools\\_and\\_resources](http://www.erwcpt.eu/physiotherapy_and_practice/tools_and_resources) (Access date 10th March 2017)