

WCPT 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 therapist 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 therapist 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 service delivery settings including (but not limited to) institutional, industrial, occupational, private clinics and primary health services, encompassing urban and rural communities
 - includes interprofessional education and collaborative practice models
 - prepares physical therapists, if possible, to practise in environments that reflect the health 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 (eg anatomy, histology, physiology, imaging, pharmacology), behavioural and social sciences (eg psychology, ethics, sociology), movement sciences (eg kinesiology, biomechanics, exercise science), education/communication, therapeutic procedures (eg exercise and fitness, functional training in self-care/home, functional training in work/community/leisure, devices and equipment, manual therapy, airway clearance, integumentary repair/protection, electrotherapeutic modalities, physical agents and mechanical modalities) and research methodology ²
- 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, 4}

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. ^{5, 6}

1. Clinical autonomy: Responsibility of the practitioner to decide the programme of intervention and its modalities based on the diagnosis that he/she makes. ⁵
2. Management autonomy: Responsibility of the professional to manage his/her practice independently. ⁵
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. ⁵

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. ⁷

1. **Associate faculty** — the people whose employing faculty is not the physical therapy faculty and who teach their subject in physical therapy professional programmes. Examples of associate faculty are physicians and nutritionists.
2. **Clinical education director/coordinator** — is a physical therapist and an academic faculty member, who is responsible for the clinical education component of the physical

therapist professional entry level programme that is normally delivered by physical therapists in the clinical environment.⁸

3. **Core academic faculty** — the people who are employed in the physical therapy faculty to teach physical therapy professional education programmes.

Approval, review and related policy information	
Date adopted:	<p>Originally adopted at the 13th General Meeting of WCPT June 1995.</p> <p>Revised and re-approved at the 15th General Meeting of WCPT June 2003.</p> <p>Revised 2007 to incorporate the Position Statement: Education for entry-level physical therapists (1995) and adopted at the 16th General Meeting of WCPT, June 2007.</p> <p>Revised and re-approved at the 17th General Meeting of WCPT June 2011.</p> <p>Revised and re-approved at the 18th General Meeting of WCPT May 2015.</p>
Date for review:	2019
Related WCPT policies:	<p>WCPT policy statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of physical therapy • Regulation of the physical therapy profession <p>WCPT guidelines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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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4. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. Policy statement: Regulation of the physical therapy profession. London, UK: WCPT; 2017. www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-regulation (Access date 10th March 2017)

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