

Ethical responsibilities of physical therapists and WCPT members

The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) expects its member organisations to:

- have a code of ethics or code of conduct
- publish, promote and circulate their code of ethics or code of conduct for the benefit of their members, the general public, employers, governments and government agencies
- have procedures for monitoring the practice of their members, disciplinary procedures and sanctions for members whose practice falls outside their code of ethics or code of conduct

WCPT offers advice and support to its member organisations wishing to develop codes of ethics or conduct.

The following statements expand on WCPT's ethical principles.¹ They are intended to help member organisations and individuals interpret WCPT's ethical principles, with a particular view to supporting those physical therapy organisations wishing to develop codes of ethics that are consistent with WCPT's own ethical principles.

Ethical principle 1:

Physical therapists respect the rights and dignity of all individuals.

Everyone who seeks the services of a physical therapist has the right to service regardless of age, gender, race, nationality, religion, ethnic origin, creed, colour, sexual orientation, disability, health status or politics.

Physical therapists should assure that patients/clients have the right to:

- the highest quality physical therapy services
- information about the physical therapy services
- make an informed consent
- confidentiality
- have access to their physical therapy data
- health education and health promotion services
- choose who should be informed on his/her behalf

Ethical principle 2:

Physical therapists comply with the laws and regulations governing the practice of physical therapy in the country in which they practise.

Physical therapists will have a full understanding of the laws and regulations governing the practice of physical therapy. They have the right to refuse to intervene/treat or otherwise intervene when, in their opinion, the service is not in the best interests of the patient/client.

Physical therapists have the right to advocate for patient's/client's access to physical therapist services when, in their opinion, there is restricted access to those who have the capacity to benefit.

Ethical principle 3:

Physical therapists accept responsibility for the exercise of sound judgement.

Physical therapists are professionally independent and autonomous practitioners. They make independent judgements in the provision of services for which they have knowledge and skills.

With each patient/client, physical therapists must undertake an examination/assessment to allow the development of a diagnosis. In light of the diagnosis and other relevant information about the patient/client and their goals, physical therapists determine the prognosis/plan of care and implement the interventions/treatment. When the goals have been achieved or further benefits can no longer be obtained, the physical therapist shall inform and discharge the patient/client. When the diagnosis is not clear or the required intervention/treatment is not within the realm of physical therapist practice, the physical therapist shall inform the patient/client and facilitate a referral to other professionals.

Physical therapists shall not delegate to another health professional or support worker any activity that requires the unique skill, knowledge and judgement of the physical therapist.

If the patient/client has been referred to the physical therapist by a medical or other practitioner and the treatment programme prescribed is not appropriate in the judgement of the physical therapist, then the physical therapist should consult with the referring practitioner.

Physical therapists have the right to expect co-operation from their colleagues.

Ethical principle 4:

Physical therapists provide honest, competent and accountable professional services.

Physical therapists shall:

- ensure that their behaviour and conduct is professional at all times
- deliver timely, patient/client-specific physical therapy intervention/treatment in line with the individual's goals
- ensure that patients/clients understand the nature of the service being provided, especially the anticipated costs (both time and financial)
- undertake a continuous, planned, personal development programme designed to maintain and enhance professional knowledge and skills
- maintain appropriate patient/client records to allow effective evaluation of the patient's/client's services rendered and evaluation of the physical therapist's practice
- not disclose any information about a patient/client to a third party without the patient's/client's permission or prior knowledge, unless such disclosure is required by law
- participate in peer review and other forms of practice evaluation, the results of which shall not be disclosed to another party without the permission of the physical therapist
- maintain data to facilitate service performance measurement and make that data available to other agents as required by mutual agreement
- not allow their services to be misused

The ethical principles governing the practice of physical therapy shall take precedence over any business or employment practice. Where such conflict arises, the physical therapist shall make all

efforts to rectify the matter, seeking the assistance of the national physical therapy association if required.

Ethical principle 5:

Physical therapists are committed to providing quality services.

Physical therapists shall:

- be aware of the currently accepted standards of practice and undertake activities which measure their conformity
- participate in continuing professional development to enhance their basic knowledge and to gain new knowledge
- support research that contributes to improved patient/client interventions and service delivery
- keep up to date with the best evidence available and implement it in their practice
- support quality education in academic and clinical settings

Physical therapists engaged in research shall ensure that they:

- abide by all current rules and policies applying to the conduct of research on human subjects
- have obtained subjects' consent
- protect subjects' confidentiality
- protect subjects' safety and well-being
- do not engage in fraud or plagiarism
- fully disclose any research support and appropriately acknowledge any assistance
- report any breaches of the rules to appropriate authorities
- freely share the results of their research, especially in journals and conference presentations

Physical therapists in the role of employer shall:

- ensure all employees are properly and duly qualified, ensuring compliance with statutory requirements
- apply current management principles and practices to the conduct of the service, with particular attention to appropriate standards of personnel management
- ensure policies and procedures are properly developed, implemented and monitored
- ensure that clinical practice is appropriately evaluated and audited
- provide adequate opportunities for staff education and personal development based on effective performance appraisal

Ethical principle 6:

Physical therapists are entitled to a just and fair level of remuneration for their services.

Physical therapists shall:

- ensure that their fee schedules are based on prevailing market conditions
- ensure that fees charged offer value for money
- ensure as much as possible that reimbursement from third-party funders are reflective of and consistent with good practice (third-party funders should not seek to exert control in any way that restricts the scope of practice of physical therapists or inhibits their right to fair remuneration)
- ensure that influence is not used for personal gain

- ensure that sound business principles are applied when dealing with suppliers, manufacturers and other agents

Ethical principle 7:

Physical therapists provide accurate information to patients/clients, other agencies and the community about physical therapy and about the services physical therapists provide.

Physical therapists:

- shall participate in public education programmes, providing information about the profession
- shall inform the public and referring professionals truthfully about the nature of their service so that individuals are more able to make a decision about the use of the service
- may advertise their services
- shall not use false, fraudulent, misleading, deceptive, unfair or sensational statements or claims
- shall claim only those titles which correctly describe their professional status

Ethical principle 8:

Physical therapists contribute to the planning and development of services that address the health needs of the community.

Physical therapists have a duty and obligation to participate in planning services designed to provide optimum community health.

Physical therapists are obliged to work toward achieving justice in the provision of health services for all people.

Glossary

Codes of practice/conduct — are ethical rules and principles that form an obligatory part of professional practice. They may be established by the physical therapy profession and may be incorporated into national rules and laws. ²

Informed consent — is a decision to participate in examination/assessment, intervention/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 examination/assessment, intervention/treatment or research. Informed consent protects the individual's freedom of choice and respects the individual's autonomy. ³ In order to obtain the valid consent of patients for examination/assessment, intervention/treatment or participation in research, they must be informed of all potential and significant risks, benefits and likely outcomes of intervention/treatment, taking into account their age, emotional state and cognitive ability, to allow valid/informed consent to be given. ^{4, 5}

Professional ethics — are a collection of criteria, rules and moral values that are formulated and assumed by people who is development a professional activity. To practise the profession of physical

therapy, WCPT has established eight ethical principles that are expected to be observed by the physical therapist. ¹

Professional regulation — is designed to protect the public interest by ensuring that physical therapists meet (and continue to meet) the standards or requirements for practice. The approach to regulation and the specific regulatory mechanisms vary by jurisdiction and are often provided by laws, regulations, directives or rules set by the regulatory authority. Professional regulation may also be overseen by the profession itself, this is referred to as “self-regulation”. ⁶

Regulated profession — a profession that may only be practised by individuals who have been certified by the relevant regulatory authority as meeting the standards or requirements for the practice of that profession. ⁶

Approval, review and related policy information	
Date adopted:	Originally adopted at the 13 th General Meeting of WCPT June 1995 as an appendix to the Declaration of Principle: Ethical Principles. Revised and re-approved at the 16 th General Meeting of WCPT June 2007. Approved at the 17 th General Meeting of WCPT, June 2011, with accompanying ethical principles as separate document. Revised and re-approved at the 18 th General Meeting of WCPT, May 2015.
Date for review:	2019
Related WCPT policies:	WCPT ethical principles WCPT policy statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patients'/clients' rights in physical therapy WCPT endorsements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endorsement: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child • Endorsement: The United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

References

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2. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. Policy statement: Ethical responsibilities of physical therapists and WCPT members. London, UK: WCPT; 2017. www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-ethical-responsibilities (Access date 10th March 2017)
3. Council for International Organizations of Medical Science. International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research Involving Human Subjects. London, UK: CIOMS; 2002. http://cioms.ch/publications/layout_guide2002.pdf (Access date 10th March 2017)
4. Chartered Society of Physiotherapy. Quality Assurance Standards for physiotherapy service delivery. London, UK: CSP; 2013. <http://www.csp.org.uk/publications/quality-assurance-standards> (Access date 10th March 2017)

5. European Region of World Confederation for Physical Therapy. European Core Standards of Physiotherapy Practice. Brussels, Belgium: ER-WCPT; 2008.
http://www.ercpt.eu/physiotherapy_and_practice/tools_and_resources (Access date 10th March 2017)
6. 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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