WCPT guideline for physical therapist practice
specialisation

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WCPT guidelines are produced to assist member organisations and others to raise the quality of physical therapy. They may provide guidance on standards criteria or courses of action in areas relevant to physical therapy education research practice or policy. They are not mandatory but designed to assist the implementation of WCPT’s policies.
Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This guideline has been developed for the use of WCPT member organisations supporting physical therapists in their endeavours to develop specialist levels of knowledge and skills in defined areas of physical therapy, and thus deliver the highest quality evidence based services to their patients/clients.  

The guideline is intended to help member organisations establish procedures for the qualification of physical therapist specialists.

While the guideline has been developed for and with input from member organisations of WCPT, the intent is that it may be used as well by countries where physical therapy associations and education programmes do not currently exist and where the profession is not represented in WCPT.

Other policies and guidelines intended to assist in the delivery of this guideline include:

- WCPT policy statement: Physical therapist practice specialisation.  
- WCPT policy statement: Education.  
- WCPT guideline for delivering quality continuing professional development for physical therapists.

1.2 Background

Formal recognition of physical therapists with additional qualifications and experience “specialisation” has the potential to provide increased benefits to the health and well being of patients/clients, to reduce health system costs, and to encourage the retention and motivation of senior highly qualified members of the profession.

1.3 Target audience

This guideline provides a basis for the development of physical therapist practice specialisation and maybe used by:

- WCPT member organisations
- potential WCPT member organisations
- national physical therapy organisations
- employing authorities
- monitoring and regulatory bodies
- government policy makers
1.4 Application

The guideline provides a means of describing the nature and characteristics of physical therapist practice specialisation and represents general expectations about standards.

The guideline is an important external source of reference for developing and implementing physical therapist practice specialisation strategies. It provides for international consistency in the design of specialist services whilst permitting innovation within an agreed framework.

The guideline also provides a framework for quality assurance purposes by enabling a specific instance of practice specialisation to be reviewed and evaluated against agreed general expectations.

This guideline may be modified and interpreted by individual WCPT member organisations, within the context of their situation, while maintaining the practice specialisation standards the guideline is designed to facilitate.

Section 2: Guideline

2.1 The formal process of specialist qualification should provide for the following:

2.1.1 A board, council or committee of, or accredited by, the member organisation, specifically established and mandated to act in all matters concerned with the qualification of specialist physical therapists.

2.1.2 A board, council or committee of, or accredited by, the member organisation to establish and monitor the requirements of each recognised speciality.

2.1.3 The participation by representatives of recognised medical and other health professions as and when appropriate.

2.2 In addition, the formal process of specialist qualification should be open to all appropriately qualified physical therapists who meet the defined and published criteria of the responsible boards, councils or committees of, or accredited by, the member organisation.

2.3 In so far as the member organisation bears final responsibility for all matters concerned with specialisation, it has a duty to institute and publish appeals procedures which it, or its accredited agent(s), will independently administer in the interest of individuals or groups of physical therapists with a grievance in matters concerned with specialisation.

Glossary

Advanced clinical competence — is the demonstration of knowledge and skills beyond those required for entry to basic professional practice.¹

Specialist physical therapist — is a physical therapist who has formally demonstrated an ability to apply advanced clinical competence in a defined clinical area, within the scope of practice recognised as physical therapy. A specialist physical therapist will practise primarily in a specific area of clinical and/or teaching practice, but would be expected to also be involved in research and evaluation and practice/service development relevant to their practice setting.¹

Physical therapy speciality — is a prescribed area of physical therapy practice formally recognised by a Member Organisation within which it is possible for a physical therapist to develop and demonstrate higher levels of knowledge and skills.¹

Specialisation — is the application of advanced clinical competence by a physical therapist qualified in a defined area within the scope of practice recognised as physical therapy.¹
Additional resources


References


Publication, review and related policy information

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<th>Date published:</th>
<th>Originally approved as part of the WCPT position statement: Specialisation at the 13th General Meeting of WCPT June 1995.</th>
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