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. 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.

WCPT encourages its member organisations to support and work toward:

- assurance that entry level physical therapist professional education requirements meet WCPT’s guidelines
- 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

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.

1. Clinical autonomy: Responsibility of the practitioner to decide the programme of intervention and its modalities based on the diagnosis that he/she makes.
2. Management autonomy: Responsibility of the professional to manage his/her practice independently.
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. 4, 6

Approval, review and related policy information

| Date adopted:            | Originally adopted at the 13th General Meeting of WCPT June 1995.  
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Revised and re-approved at the 17th General Meeting of WCPT June 2011.  
Revised and re-approved at the 18th General Meeting of WCPT May 2015.  |
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References


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