

Physical Therapy

Includes:

- Physical therapist
- Physical therapist assistant

Physical Therapist

The physical therapist provides services to many different kinds of patients/clients, from those recovering from accidents or illness and people with disabilities to world-class athletes. Physical therapists help improve patients' strength and mobility, relieve pain, and prevent or limit permanent physical disabilities. Physical therapists take a personal and direct approach to meeting an individual's health goals, working closely with the patient and other health care practitioners. They provide the patient and the patient's family with instruction and home programs to ensure that healing continues after direct patient care has ended.

Physical therapists also work to keep people well and safe from injury, emphasizing the importance of fitness and conditioning and showing people how to avoid injuries at work or play. Physical therapy promotes optimal physical performance and enables health-conscious people to increase their overall fitness level and muscular strength and endurance.



Career Description

The physical therapist is able to evaluate a patient's

- Aerobic capacity and endurance
- Joint motion
- Muscle strength and endurance
- Posture
- Pain
- Functional ability
- Muscle tone and reflexes
- Appearance and stability of walking
- Need and use of braces and artificial limbs
- Function of the heart and lungs
- Integrity of sensation and perception
- Integrity and health of skin
- Performance of activities required in daily living
- Developmental activities

Physical therapy techniques include:

- Therapeutic exercise
- Mobilization/manipulation and range-of-motion exercises
- Cardiovascular endurance training
- Relaxation exercises
- Therapeutic massage
- Biofeedback
- Training in activities of daily living
- Wound debridement
- Pulmonary physical therapy
- Ambulation training

Modalities, including traction, ultrasound, diathermy, electrotherapy, cryotherapy, hydrotherapy, and laser therapy, also can be applied during the treatment program.



Employment Characteristics

Physical therapists work in hospitals as well as

- Private physical therapy offices
- Community health centers
- Corporate or industrial health centers
- Sports facilities
- Research institutions
- Rehabilitation centers
- Nursing homes
- Home health agencies
- Schools
- Pediatric centers
- Colleges and universities



Salary

Average annual income for physical therapists is approximately \$70,000, depending on geographic location and practice setting. Physical therapists have the potential to earn more than \$100,000 annually. Refer to Section IV, Table 5 of this *Directory* for more information, or see www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.



Employment Outlook

Career opportunities in the field of physical therapy will increase as the "baby boom" generation ages and more patients begin to require treatment for arthritis, stroke, heart disease, and other conditions common to older people. In addition, with the nation's increasing participation in sports and fitness activities, more physical therapists will be needed to treat and help prevent knee, leg, back, shoulder, and other musculoskeletal injuries.

Opportunities also exist for physical therapists from minority groups, who are in great demand but short supply in all aspects of the profession. When physical therapists and their clients share a common language and similar background, the effectiveness of treatment is enhanced.



Educational Programs

Length. All physical therapist education programs culminate in a post-baccalaureate degree. As of July 1, 2006, almost 77% of accredited programs offer the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) degree; all but two of the remaining programs have indicated their intent to convert to offer the DPT in the future.

Prerequisites. Candidates should have a high overall grade point average (GPA) and a high GPA in prerequisite coursework. Volunteer experience as a physical therapy aide, letters of recommendation from physical therapists or science teachers, and excellent writing and interpersonal skills are also highly valued.

Curriculum. Educational programs include basic and clinical medical science courses and emphasize the theory and practice of physical therapy. The curriculum includes opportunities to apply and integrate theory through extensive clinical education and a variety of practice settings.



Licensure, Certification, and Registration

After graduating from an accredited education program, physical therapist candidates must pass a state-administered national exam. Other requirements for physical therapy practice vary from state to state according to physical therapy practice acts or state regulations that govern physical therapy. For more information, contact the state licensing boards.

Physical Therapist Assistant



Career Description

Physical therapist assistants work under the supervision of a physical therapist. Their duties include assisting the physical therapist by providing selected interventions within the plan of care, training patients in exercises and activities of daily living, conducting treatments, using special equipment, administering modalities and other treatment procedures, and reporting to the physical therapist on the patient's responses.



Employment Characteristics

Physical therapist assistants work in

- Hospitals
- Private physical therapy offices
- Community health centers
- Corporate or industrial health centers
- Sports facilities
- Research institutions
- Rehabilitation centers
- Nursing homes
- Home health agencies
- Schools
- Pediatric centers
- Colleges and universities



Salary

The median income for a physical therapist assistant is \$26,000; PTAs employed in the southern and western regions of the nation generally earn higher salaries. Refer to Section IV, Table 5 of this *Directory* for more information, or see www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.



Educational Programs

Length. These associate's degree programs—usually offered in a community or junior college—are 2 years long.

Prerequisites. Successful completion of high school courses in social sciences, biology, mathematics, physics, English, and chemistry is encouraged but not required.

Curriculum. The curriculum includes 1 year of general education and 1 year of technical courses and clinical experience.



Inquiries

Careers, Education, and Certification

American Physical Therapy Association
1111 North Fairfax Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-1488
703 684-2782 or 800 999-2782
703 684-7343 Fax
www.apta.org

Program Accreditation

Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education
Mary Jane Harris, MS PT, Director of Accreditation
1111 North Fairfax Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
703 684-2782
www.apta.org/capte