

# Essential skills and attributes required for the study of Physical Therapy / Physiotherapy

*Ontario Council of University Programs in Rehabilitation Sciences (OCUPRS) Policy Document, July 2009*

## Introduction

The Ontario university programs in Physical Therapy / Physiotherapy<sup>1</sup> are responsible to society for providing their enrolled students with opportunities to develop the qualifications (academic knowledge, professional behaviours, attitudes and clinical skills) to enter the profession of Physical Therapy in Ontario. The purpose of this document is to describe the skills and attributes required for success in completing a university program in Physical Therapy. Students interested in pursuing a degree in Physical Therapy are encouraged to review the following document that outlines the requisite skills and attributes for the profession.

An offer of admission to a Physical Therapy program should not be interpreted as evidence that the Physical Therapy program has independently verified an applicant's skills and attributes in the domains described below. These skills and attributes are essential if students are to be successful in achieving the competency standards of the profession.

The competency standards for Physical Therapy are described in the *Essential Competency Profile for Physiotherapists in Canada*.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, students admitted to the Physical Therapy programs must possess the skills and abilities described below in order to be able to develop the competencies required of an entry-to-practice Physical Therapist. Students must be able to demonstrate sound clinical and professional judgment and demonstrate responsible decision making to become graduates who are cognizant of practice accountability issues, laws, regulations, professional codes of ethics and standards of practice.

In addition to obtaining a degree in Physical Therapy, an individual must pass the Canadian Physiotherapy Competency Examination (PCE) in order to obtain registration/licensure as a Physiotherapist in most jurisdictions in Canada. The PCE has

two components: a Written Component and a Clinical Component. Prospective candidates should be aware that the Clinical Component requires candidates to demonstrate knowledge, skills and behaviours in communication, physical examination, analysis, evaluation, intervention planning and execution all in timed simulations of patient encounters.<sup>3</sup>

It is anticipated that reasonable accommodation may be provided to individuals who demonstrate such requirement on the basis of a prohibited ground of discrimination. The following description of skills and attributes is not intended to preclude individuals who may require reasonable accommodation. Students who anticipate that reasonable accommodation will enable them to meet the required standards for these skills and abilities are responsible for articulating their requirements. Requests for accommodation or an extension of time to complete the program are considered on a case-by-case basis according to the applicable policies, regulations and procedures. Applicants are strongly encouraged to seek out and review the policies, regulations and procedures regarding accommodation at the university(ies) and program(s) to which they are applying. If admitted to a program, students will be required to follow the policies and procedures of the university and faculty/school within which the program is located.

## Description of the Skills and Attributes for Students in a Master's-level program in Physical Therapy

### ***Aptitude and attitude***

Students seeking to enter a Physical Therapy program must have an interest in human movement, health and a desire to assist individuals to maximize their mobility, function and life participation. They must demonstrate sensitivity, compassion, integrity, and concern for others. Students must have the cognitive abilities to understand and develop the theoretical knowledge and technical expertise to work collaboratively with their peers, patients, and colleagues. They must be respectful of individuality and diversity, build trusting relationships, demonstrate excellent interpersonal skills to engage and motivate patients and families, demonstrate creative problem solving skills and be able to manage multiple, potentially competing demands.

### ***Information gathering skills***

Students must be able to participate in learning situations that require skill in gathering information about a patient in the course of an assessment. This information is typically acquired through observing, listening and palpating parts of the body. Gathering information also includes reading charts or other written documentation and use of assessment tools.

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<sup>1</sup> Physical Therapy and Physiotherapy are interchangeable in Canada. The terms "Physiotherapist" and "Physical Therapist" are equivalent under the law in Ontario and other jurisdictions in Canada. Three of five Ontario academic programs lead to a degree in "Physical Therapy" and two lead to a degree in "Physiotherapy."

<sup>2</sup> The *Essential Competency Profile for Physiotherapists in Canada* was published in July 2004 by a partnership of the Accreditation Council for Canadian Physiotherapy Academic Programs, the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators, the Canadian Physiotherapy Association and the Canadian Universities Physical Therapy Academic Council. The document is available for download from the College of Physiotherapists of Ontario website, specifically at <http://www.collegept.org/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=25321>.

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<sup>3</sup> For more complete information about the national Physiotherapy Competency Examination, consult the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators at [http://www.alliancept.org/exams\\_overview.shtml](http://www.alliancept.org/exams_overview.shtml).

### **Communication skills**

Students must be able to speak, hear and observe patients in order to effectively and efficiently elicit information, describe mood, activity, posture and perceive non-verbal communication. Students must be able to communicate effectively and sensitively with patients, families and any member of the health care team. Students must be able to coherently summarize a patient's condition, assessment and intervention plan verbally and in text (handwritten or electronic) to comply with regulatory and organizational record-keeping standards.

Students should note that the level of communication fluency is often higher than is generally assessed in standard tests of language fluency. Students with less than full fluency in the principal language of the Physical Therapy Program are responsible for achieving the high level of communication ability that is required for patient safety, informed consent and fully independent and ethical interaction with patients.

### **Critical thinking skills**

Students must demonstrate the cognitive skills and memory necessary to measure, calculate, and reason in order to analyze, integrate and synthesize information. In addition, students must be able to comprehend multidimensional and spatial relationships. These comprehensive problem solving activities must be done in an acceptable timeframe relative to their peers. Students also need to be able to demonstrate the ability to accurately assess their performance to further direct their learning. Effective problem solving and judgment are necessary to address patient needs, and engage the patient in a safe and efficient manner. Students must have critical appraisal skills in order to build a foundation for evidence-based practice. Students must demonstrate these critical thinking skills in their course work both at the university and in the clinical environment.

### **Psychomotor/Physical skills**

Students must demonstrate sufficient motor function to safely perform initial and ongoing assessments and interventions on a patient, including collecting data and assessment measures. Students must be able to use common diagnostic aids or instruments either directly or in an adaptive form (e.g., sphygmomanometer, stethoscope, goniometer) and provide the necessary physical guidance for exercise and/or functional movement by instruction or demonstration. Students must be able to execute motor movements reasonably required to ensure patient safety and treatment effectiveness, either through the students' own movement or through their ability to guide or direct the movement of others. Sample situations that require such movement include positioning patients in bed; balance, gait or transfer training; mobilization techniques; therapeutic exercise; or maneuvering in confined spaces. In addition,

students are expected to physically be able to participate in all learning experiences of the educational program (e.g., for clinical skills laboratory work) and therefore should be able to sit, bend, reach and/or walk or stand for most of the day.

### **Emotional Health**

Students must consistently demonstrate the emotional health required for full utilization of their intellectual abilities, in the context of the physical, emotional, and mental demands of the program. Students must demonstrate adaptability to changing environments and the ability to function effectively under stress. The development of mature, sensitive and effective relationships with patients, families and other members of the health care team is also required. Students must consistently demonstrate the emotional resilience and balance to manage a myriad of emotionally charged or ethically challenging scenarios that frequently arise in all work settings.