

Autonomy

Policy statement

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Autonomy

The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) advises 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.¹ The services provided by physical therapists encompass health promotion, prevention, examination/assessment, evaluation, diagnosis, 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.¹

WCPT encourages its member organisations to support and work toward:

- assurance that entry level physical therapist professional education requirements meet WCPT's guidelines²
- 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 therapists³

Glossary (<https://world.physio/resources/glossary>)

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Approval, review and related policy information	
Date adopted:	Originally adopted at the 13 th General Meeting of WCPT June 1995. Revised and re-approved at the 16 th General Meeting of WCPT June 2007. Revised and re-approved at the 17 th General Meeting of WCPT June 2011. Revised and re-approved at the 18 th General Meeting of WCPT May 2015. Revised and re-approved at the 19 th General Meeting of WCPT May 2019
Date for review:	2023
Related WCPT policies:	WCPT policy statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct access and patient/client self-referral to physical therapy • Relationships with other health professionals • Regulation of the physical therapy profession • Reciprocity – mutual recognition WCPT guidelines: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guideline for physical therapist professional entry level education • Guideline for the development of a system of legislation/regulation/ recognition of physical therapists

References

1. 1.World Confederation for Physical Therapy. Policy statement: Description of physical therapy. London, UK: WCPT; 2019. www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-descriptionPT (Access date 30 August 2019)
2. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. WCPT guideline for physical therapist professional entry level education. London, UK: WCPT; 2011. www.wcpt.org/guidelines/entry-level-education (Access date 30 August 2019)
3. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. Policy statement: Regulation of the physical therapy profession. London, UK: WCPT; 2019. www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-regulation (Access date 30 August 2019)

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