

Occupational health and safety of physical therapists

Policy statement

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The World Confederation of Physical Therapy (WCPT) endorses the concept of decent work and advocates for the right of physical therapists to safe and healthy work and work environments that assures their own health and safety and that of their patients/clients. ¹

WCPT supports international conventions and promotes the development and application of international, national and local policies and/or procedures that will safeguard physical therapists' right to safe and healthy practice environments ²⁻⁵, wherever they practice.

WCPT advocates for the development and provision of occupational health and safety legislation covering the whole physical therapy workforce.

WCPT believes in the prevention of undesirable work-related outcomes resulting from occupational hazards, supporting initiatives for health promotion, injury and illness prevention, reduction/avoidance of exposure to occupational hazards and elimination of these hazards to the extent possible.

WCPT also supports the allocation of resources to ensure the best occupational health and safety services and the inspection of practice settings.

WCPT encourages member organisations to do the following.

1. Urge their governments and employers of physical therapists to:

- adopt safe systems of work, and a risk management approach ⁶ to occupational health and safety ⁷
- demonstrate compliance with the occupational health and safety (OHS) requirements of their individual country ⁸
- ensure that health facilities are designed and maintained according to OHS requirements
- encourage the development of culturally appropriate occupational health and safety policies and intervention/treatment plans, including return-to-work programmes following a period of prolonged absence ⁹
- encourage a self-monitoring process to achieve compliance with industry regulated standards that meet the OHS requirements for physical therapy professionals, students of the profession, volunteers and other workers with whom physical therapists interact.

2. Facilitate safe and healthy work environments for physical therapists by

- raising their awareness of occupational hazards and associated risks that may be relevant to their practice
- raising physical therapists' awareness of appropriate controls and risk management practices
- advocating for physical therapists' access to operational controls for occupational health and safety risks ¹⁰ including
 - safe systems of work ⁷
 - appropriate staffing levels (numbers and skill mix) and conditions of employment (e.g. remuneration, sick leave, holiday)
 - supporting rights to respectful work environments, free from discrimination, intimidation, violence, sexual harassment and bullying
 - appropriate injury/illness reporting systems

- immunisation
 - appropriate personal protective equipment (e.g. clothing, masks, gloves)
 - supporting those with responsibility for managing physical therapists to implement appropriate systems by promoting awareness of relevant existing and emerging issues
 - informing employers of physical therapists about their obligations to induct, train and consult with their staff about relevant occupational hazards and their control
 - cooperating with other organisations supporting physical therapists' rights to safe and healthy work environments
 - extending these measures to students of the profession, volunteers and other workers with whom physical therapists interact
 - promoting policies for physical therapists practising alone as sole practitioners or in rural, remote or isolated practice environments
3. Promote scholarship and research into safe physical therapy practice for practitioners including health promotion, work organisation, the work environment and risk management.
 4. Recognise and promote the contribution of physical therapists working in the OHS domain to support the creation of a safe work environment for work colleagues.

Glossary (www.world.physio/resources/glossary)

Decent work

Hazard

Health

Health promotion

Manual handling

Occupational health and safety (OHS)

Positive practice environments (PPE)

Practice settings

Approval, review and related policy information	
Date adopted:	Approved at the 17th General Meeting of WCPT in June 2011. Revised and re-approved at the 18th General Meeting of WCPT May 2015. Revised and re-approved at the 19th General Meeting of WCPT May 2019.
Date for review:	2023
Related WCPT policies:	WCPT policy statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infection prevention and control • Standards of physical therapist practice • Ethical principles

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