

# Physical therapist support personnel

Policy statement

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# Physical therapist support personnel

The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) advocates that policies for using physical therapist support personnel have to be determined at a national level. Physical therapy is an internationally recognised health profession. It may be practised only by qualified and, where required by state or national legislation, duly licensed/registered physical therapists. WCPT advocates that where physical therapist support personnel are utilised, direction and supervision from a physical therapist are essential in the provision of quality physical therapy services. The degree of direction and supervision necessary for assuring quality physical therapy services is dependent upon many factors, including the education, experiences, and responsibilities of the parties involved, the needs of the patient/client and the organisational structure in which the physical therapy services are provided.

WCPT acknowledges the different stances held by member organisations about the inclusion of support personnel as part of the physical therapy workforce, including the fact that member organisations may not support the employment of physical therapist support personnel in direct patient/client physical therapy services whilst others have carefully defined career pathways specifically for support personnel.

The term support personnel is used in a generic sense to encompass a range of employment classifications such as physical therapist assistant, physical therapist aide, physical therapist technician or physical therapist helper.

Where physical therapist support personnel are employed, WCPT advocates that member organisations should ensure that:

- support personnel be referred to as only “physical therapist assistant, physical therapist aide, physical therapist technician or physical therapist helper” and not “physical therapy assistant, aide, technician or helper”
- physical therapist support personnel only assist the physical therapist in administration of physical therapist selected interventions/treatment and only in a properly conducted physical therapy service under the direction and supervision of the physical therapist
- nature and frequency of supervision of physical therapist support personnel is appropriate to the circumstances and in line with local guidelines
- the physical therapy profession is actively involved in human resource discussions, decisions and policy changes concerning the potential use of physical therapist support personnel and their roles and required competencies
- member organisations use effective consumer and marketing policies to assure that employers, governments and the community understand that such support personnel do not replace a qualified physical therapist
- services employing physical therapist support personnel ensure they are always clearly identified so it is evident to the patient/client that the person is not a physical therapist.
- the scope of work for physical therapist support personnel must be clearly identified to ensure compliance with state or national legislation/regulation/recognition
- physical therapist support personnel are adequately trained to perform effectively and safely any direct intervention/treatment identified by the member organisation as being within the scope of physical therapist support personnel
- physical therapist support personnel have access to continuing professional development (CPD)

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- the ethical principles guiding the conduct of physical therapists should contain specific reference to the proper use of physical therapist support personnel in direct patient/client intervention/treatment <sup>1,2</sup>
  - providing membership to physical therapist support personnel has been considered

WCPT advocates that, regardless of the setting in which the physical therapy service is provided, the following responsibilities must be carried out only by the physical therapist and may not be delegated to physical therapist support personnel:

- interpreting referrals when available
- performing the patient/client initial and follow-up examination/assessment, evaluating the data from the examination/assessment, establishing the diagnosis and prognosis/plan, and providing interventions/treatments that cannot be delegated
- developing or modifying the plan that is based on the initial examination/ assessment or re-examination and that includes the physical therapy anticipated goals and expected outcomes
- determining when the physical therapist's expertise and decision-making is required to provide the intervention/treatment and when it may be appropriate to delegate to the physical therapist support personnel
- determining the most appropriate utilisation of the physical therapist support personnel that provides for the delivery of a service that is safe, effective and efficient
- establishing the discharge plan and documenting the discharge summary

In jurisdictions where regulation is mature and functioning well the feasibility of introducing regulation of physical therapist support personnel should be considered.

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**Glossary** ([www.world.physio/resources/glossary](http://www.world.physio/resources/glossary))

**Assessment**

**Continuing professional development (CPD)**

**Diagnosis**

**Goals (clinical)**

**Physical therapy**

**Professional regulation**

**Prognosis**

**Scope of practice**

**Support personnel**

**Workforce**

<b>Approval, review and related policy information</b>	
<b>Date adopted:</b>	Originally approved at the 13th General Meeting of WCPT June 1995. Revised and re-approved at the 16th General Meeting of WCPT June 2007. 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. Revised and re-approved at the 19th General Meeting of WCPT May 2019.
<b>Date for review:</b>	2023
<b>Related WCPT policies:</b>	WCPT ethical principles WCPT policy statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of physical therapy</li> <li>• Ethical responsibilities of physical therapists and WCPT members</li> <li>• Health human resources</li> <li>• Relationships with other health professionals</li> <li>• Regulation of the physical therapy profession</li> </ul> WCPT guideline: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WCPT guideline for the development of a system of legislation/regulation/recognition of physical therapists</li> </ul>

## References

1. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. Policy statement: Ethical responsibilities of physical therapists and WCPT member organisations. London, UK: WCPT; 2019. [www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-ethical-responsibilities](http://www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-ethical-responsibilities) (Access date 30 August 2019)
2. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. Policy statement: Physical therapist practice specialisation. London, UK: WCPT; 2019. [www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-specialisation](http://www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-specialisation) (Access date 5 September 2019)

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