

Regulation of the physical therapy profession

Policy statement

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The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) advocates for regulation of the physical therapy profession through recognised and valued systems. These systems should assure protection of the public through mechanisms including responsible self-governance of physical therapists.

Models of professional regulation vary between countries and are influenced by many factors, including the system of government, the health system and the history of the profession. In order to be effective, any system of regulation must take into account the economic, political and cultural context in which the system is being implemented.

WCPT recognises that physical therapists may be regulated through a legislated system that includes licensing or registration by the profession or an external regulatory authority. Alternatively, in some countries, the profession is regulated by physical therapists meeting membership criteria for the professional organisation.

Physical therapy is an internationally recognised health profession which must only be practised by qualified physical therapists. ¹ Where required by state or national legislation, they are entitled to hold a valid registration/licence to practise physical therapy and/or use the title physical therapist. ² In the absence of regulatory legislation, physical therapists are recognised through their eligibility for membership in the WCPT member organisation in that country, in so far as one exists.

WCPT encourages member organisations to work towards a system of regulation that focuses on the public interest. Such a system will promote trust and confidence in the profession. The system can achieve this through mechanisms that ensure only physical therapists, who are duly educated and competent, are able to use the title physical therapist or physiotherapist. ²

Effective regulation is characterised by six key elements:

- assurance qualified physical therapists meet entry level standards of practice, graduating from education programmes that provide quality education
- assurance of standards of continuing professional competence or proficiency
- presence of standards of professional ethics and conduct
- maintenance of a register of licensed/regulated/recognised physical therapists
- mechanisms to address non-compliance with the established standards of practice
- mechanisms to address new or advanced scopes of practice not benchmarked at entry level standards of practice

These key elements are inter-related and represent the pillars that underpin regulatory approaches that serve the public interest, in particular to protect the safety of the public. In many cases, effective regulation can be achieved by embedding standards of professional education, performance, conduct and competence within the system of regulation. These standards, together with mechanisms to monitor and foster practitioner compliance and manage non-compliance, provide the means by which the profession can protect the public.

WCPT encourages member organisations to ensure that a mechanism is in place by which the public can report or make a complaint about a licensed/regulated/recognised physical therapist to an appropriate authority. Contemporary complaint mechanisms include dispute resolution methods such as mediation and conciliation rather than only “command and control” methods or more punitive approaches.

WCPT encourages member organisations to work towards regulation systems that:

- define the qualifications required for licensure/regulation/recognition to practise physical therapy
- restrict use of the titles physical therapist and physiotherapist to licensed/registered/recognised physical therapists ²
- set and monitor standards of competence to practise physical therapy
- establish processes to assure the competence of applicants seeking recognition to practise the profession
- establish processes to assure that licensed/registered/recognised physical therapists maintain competence, such as requirements for continuing professional development and for maintenance of practice
- set and monitor standards for the practice of physical therapy by recognised/registered/ licensed physical therapists
- establish processes to deal with complaints regarding licensed/registered/recognised physical therapists
- establish processes to deal with the findings of investigations into complaints relating to licensed/registered/recognised physical therapists
- support cooperative discussions with the regulatory body, ensuring the impartiality and independence of the regulator, whilst developing, securing, implementing and maintaining engagement with high standards of education, practice and professionalism

WCPT encourages member organisations to support systems of regulation where requirements to practise physical therapy are:

- the same for all applicants regardless of nationality, race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, creed or social status ³
- based upon fair, objective and transparent criteria related to professional education, experience and/or assessment of competence
- not more burdensome than necessary to assure that only competent physical therapists are able to use the title and practise as a physical therapist or physiotherapist ²
- not used for the sole purpose of restricting the supply of physical therapists in the country concerned
- communicated in plain language
- inclusive of responsible self-governance of physical therapists

WCPT encourages member organisations to advise their members of the WCPT guideline for the development of a system of legislation/regulation/recognition.

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

Accreditation

Competence

Codes of practice/conduct

Equity

Licence/registration

Professional ethics

Protection of title

Regulated profession

Regulation authority

Standards of practice

Approval, review and related policy information	
Date adopted:	Approved at the 17th General Meeting of WCPT in June 2011. Replaced the Position Statement: regulation and reciprocity, approved at the 14th General Meeting of WCPT May 1999 which was revised and re-approved at the 16th General Meeting of WCPT June 2007. Standalone policy statement on reciprocity developed 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 ethical principles WCPT policy statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protection of title• Education• Reciprocity – mutual recognition• Standards of physical therapist practice• Diversity and inclusion WCPT guidelines: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guideline for standards of physical therapy practice• Guideline for physical therapist professional entry level education• Guideline for the development of a system of legislation/regulation/recognition of physical therapists

References

1. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. Policy statement: Education. London, UK: WCPT; 2011. www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-education (Access date 30 August 2019)
2. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. Policy statement: Protection of title. London, UK: WCPT; 2011. www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-protection-title (Access date 2 September 2019)
3. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. Policy statement: Diversity and inclusion. London, UK: WCPT; 2019. www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-diversity (Access date 3 June 2019)

Resources

WCPT website: www.wcpt.org/practice/regulation

International Network of Physiotherapy Regulatory Authorities (INPTRA): www.inptra.org/

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