

# Ethical principles and the responsibilities of physiotherapists and member organisations

Policy statement

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## Ethical principles and the responsibilities of physiotherapists and member organisations

World Physiotherapy expects its member organisations to:

- have a code of ethics or code of conduct.
- publish, promote and circulate their code of ethics or code of conduct for the benefit of their members, the general public, employers, governments and government agencies.
- ensure that the association, or relevant regulatory body, has procedures for monitoring the practice of their members, handling complaints, along with appropriate disciplinary procedures and sanctions for members whose practice falls outside their code of ethics or code of conduct.

World Physiotherapy offers advice and support to its member organisations wishing to develop codes of ethics or conduct.

World Physiotherapy expects physiotherapists to follow these ethical principles:

1. respect the rights, personal dignity, privacy and autonomy of all individuals
2. comply with the laws and regulations governing the practice of physiotherapy in the country in which they practise and the policies of their professional associations and regulatory bodies
3. accept responsibility for the exercise of sound professional judgement
4. provide honest, competent and accountable professional services
5. provide fair, equitable, inclusive and quality services
6. charge and receive a just and fair level of remuneration for their services
7. provide accurate and appropriate information to patients/clients,\* to other agencies and the community about physical therapy
8. contribute to the planning and development of services which address the health needs of the community

### **Ethical principle 1: Physiotherapists respect the rights, personal dignity, privacy and autonomy of all individuals**

Everyone who seeks the services of a physiotherapist has the right to service regardless of age, gender, race, nationality, religion, ethnic origin, creed, colour, sexual orientation, disability, health status or politics.<sup>1</sup>

Physiotherapists should assure that patients/clients have the right to:

- the highest quality physiotherapy services
- information about the physiotherapy services
- either provide informed consent or refuse treatment
- confidentiality

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\* The term patient/client is used in this document as a generic term to refer to individuals and groups of individuals who can benefit from physiotherapy interventions/treatments.

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- have access to their physiotherapy data
  - health education and health promotion services
  - choose who, if anyone should be informed on his/her behalf

**Ethical principle 2: Physiotherapists comply with the laws and regulations governing the practice of physiotherapy in the country in which they practise and the policies of their professional associations and regulatory bodies**

Physiotherapists will have a full understanding of the laws and regulations governing the practice of physiotherapy. They have the right to refuse to intervene/treat or otherwise intervene when, in their opinion, the service is not in the best interests of the patient/client.

Physiotherapists have the right to advocate for patient's/client's access to physiotherapist services when, in their opinion, there is restricted access to those who have the capacity to benefit.

**Ethical principle 3: Physiotherapists accept responsibility for the exercise of sound professional judgement.**

Physiotherapists are professionally independent and autonomous practitioners. They make independent judgements in the provision of services for which they have knowledge and skills.

This includes developing goal based treatment plans in collaboration with patients/clients based on accurate assessment and diagnosis, accurate clinical advice and discharge planning.

Physiotherapists shall not delegate to another health professional or support worker any activity that requires the unique skill, knowledge and judgement of the physical therapist.

If the patient/client has been referred to the physiotherapist by a medical or other practitioner and a treatment programme has been prescribed it is the responsibility of the physiotherapist to assess and determine the most appropriate intervention/treatment.

Physiotherapists have the right to expect co-operation from their colleagues.

Physiotherapists will take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing<sup>2</sup> and ensure the exercising of sound professional judgement is not compromised

**Ethical principle 4: Physiotherapists provide honest, competent and accountable professional services.**

Physiotherapists shall:

- ensure that their behaviour and conduct is professional at all times
- deliver timely, patient/client-specific physiotherapy intervention/treatment in line with the individual's goals
- ensure that patients/clients understand the nature of the service being provided, especially the anticipated costs (both time and financial)
- undertake a continuous, planned, personal development programme designed to maintain and enhance professional knowledge and skills
- maintain appropriate patient/client records to allow effective evaluation of the patient's/client's services rendered and evaluation of the physiotherapist's practice

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- not disclose any information about a patient/client to a third party without the patient's/client's permission, unless such disclosure is required by law
  - participate in peer review and other forms of practice evaluation, the results of which shall not be disclosed to another party without the permission of the physiotherapist
  - maintain data to facilitate service performance measurement and make that data available to other agents as required by mutual agreement
  - not allow their services to be misused or abuse their professional power.

The ethical principles governing the practice of physiotherapy shall take precedence over any business or employment practice. Where such conflict arises, the physiotherapist shall make all efforts to rectify the matter, seeking the assistance of the national physiotherapy association if required.

**Ethical principle 5: Physiotherapists are committed to provide fair, equitable, inclusive and quality services.**

Physiotherapists shall:

- be aware of the currently accepted standards of practice and undertake activities which measure their conformity
- participate in continuing professional development to enhance and improve their knowledge and skills
- support research that contributes to improved patient/client interventions and service delivery
- keep up to date with the best evidence available and implement it in their practice
- support quality education in academic and clinical settings

Physiotherapists engaged in research shall ensure that they:

- abide by all current rules and policies applying to the conduct of research on human subjects
- have obtained subjects' informed consent
- have obtained approval from relevant ethical and administrative bodies
- protect subjects' confidentiality
- protect subjects' safety and well-being
- do not engage in fraud or plagiarism
- fully disclose any research support and appropriately acknowledge any assistance
- report any breaches of the rules to appropriate authorities
- freely share the results of their research, especially in journals and conference presentations

Physiotherapists in the role of employer shall:

- ensure all employees are properly and duly qualified, ensuring compliance with statutory requirements
- apply current management principles and practices to the conduct of the service, with particular attention to appropriate standards of personnel management
- ensure policies and procedures are properly developed, implemented and monitored
- ensure that clinical practice is appropriately evaluated and audited
- provide adequate opportunities for staff education and personal development based on effective performance appraisal

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**Ethical principle 6: Physiotherapists are entitled to charge and receive a just and fair level of remuneration for their services.**

Physiotherapists shall:

- ensure that their fee schedules are based on prevailing market conditions
- ensure that fees charged offer value for money
- ensure as much as possible that reimbursement from third-party funders are reflective of and consistent with good practice (third-party funders should not seek to exert control in any way that restricts the scope of practice of physiotherapists or inhibits their right to fair remuneration)
- ensure that influence is not misused
- ensure that sound and ethical business principles are applied when dealing with suppliers, manufacturers and other agents

**Ethical principle 7: Physiotherapists provide accurate and appropriate information to patients/clients, other agencies and the community about physiotherapy and about the services physiotherapists provide.**

Physiotherapists:

- shall participate in public education programmes, providing information about the profession
- shall inform the public and referring professionals truthfully about the nature of their service so that individuals are more able to make a decision about the use of the service
- may advertise their services in a professional manner consistent with the law of the jurisdiction in which they practice.
- shall not use false, fraudulent, misleading, deceptive, unfair or sensational statements or claims
- shall claim only those titles which correctly describe their professional status

**Ethical principle 8: Physiotherapists contribute to the planning and development of services which address the health needs of the community.**

Physiotherapists shall:

- participate in planning services designed to provide optimum community health
- work toward achieving justice in the provision of health services for all people

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[Glossary \(https://world.physio/resources/glossary\)](https://world.physio/resources/glossary)

**Codes of practice/conduct**

**Disciplinary panel/tribunal**

**Equity**

**Inclusion**

**Informed consent**

**Professional ethics**

**Professional regulation**

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**Regulated profession**

**Service standards**

**Standards of practice**

<b>Approval, review and related policy information</b>	
<b>Date adopted:</b>	<p>Originally adopted at the 13th General Meeting of WCPT June 1995 as a Declaration of Principle: Ethical Principles with an appendix. Revised and re-approved at the 16th General Meeting of WCPT June 2007.</p> <p>Approved at the 17th General Meeting of WCPT, June 2011, with ethical principles as a separate document to the policy statement on ethical responsibilities.</p> <p>Both documents revised and re-approved at the 18th General Meeting of WCPT, May 2015.</p> <p>Both documents reviewed and re-approved at the 19th General Meeting of WCPT May 2019.</p> <p>World Physiotherapy board agreed in 2022 that editorially both documents should be merged as one.</p>
<b>Date for review:</b>	2023
<b>Related World Physiotherapy policies:</b>	<p>World Physiotherapy policy statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Patients'/clients' rights in physical therapy</li><li>• Diversity and inclusion</li></ul> <p>World Physiotherapy endorsements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Endorsement: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child</li><li>• Endorsement: The United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities</li></ul>

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## References

1. World Physiotherapy. Policy statement: Diversity and inclusion. London, UK: World Physiotherapy; 2019. Available from: <https://world.physio/sites/default/files/2020-04/PS-2019-Diversity-and-inclusion.pdf>
2. World Physiotherapy. Policy statement: Occupational health and safety of physical therapists. London, UK; 2019. Available from: <https://world.physio/sites/default/files/2020-07/PS-2019-Occupational-health-and-safety.pdf>

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