

PHYSICAL THERAPY PROGRAM

The Physical Therapy Profession

Dramatic changes in the health care system have influenced the way health professionals, including physical therapists, practice. The physical therapist is knowledgeable and skilled in patient care, consultation, education and research. Existing roles in orthopedics, sports injuries, neurological disorders, pediatrics, and cardiovascular disorders are complemented by developing practice in areas of business, industry, pre- and post-operative evaluations, wellness programs, geriatrics, and consultation in school, private and government agencies. Physical therapists maintain close working relationships with other health care professionals including physicians, dentists, nurses, occupational therapists, speech/language pathologists, rehabilitation engineers and vocational counselors.

Practice in physical therapy can be described in terms of examination and evaluation, restoring, maintaining and promoting optimal physical functioning, wellness and quality of life. The physical therapy evaluation combines examination findings and clinical judgment to generate a physical therapy diagnosis, prognosis and intervention plan. It may include, but is not limited to, testing of muscle function, joint flexibility, control of movement and mobility, including balance, walking, and endurance. Physical therapists are particularly skilled in evaluating and treating patients with movement dysfunction from a variety of causes.

Evaluation forms the basis of individualized physical therapy intervention. When appropriate, intervention entails education for preventing injury. Other techniques include therapeutic exercise, manual techniques, physical agent modalities, recommendation of assistive devices, and patient education. The patient's family is often included in the education process to render physical assistance and/or ongoing emotional support.

Physical therapists participate actively in shaping the current and emerging health care environment to promote the development of high-quality, cost-effective health care services. Today, a priority of the American Physical Therapy Association is to promote the role of physical therapists as direct access primary care providers of physical therapy services and to be integral members of patient care teams in health care delivery systems. Physical therapists have a responsibility to increase public awareness of physical therapy and the selection of physical therapists for the treatment and prevention of injury, impairment, functional limitation, and disability and for the promotion and maintenance of health, fitness, and optimum quality of life.