

# Essential Skills and Attributes Required for the Study of Physical Therapy / Physiotherapy

## Introduction

This document provides information for applicants to Physical Therapy/Physiotherapy programs, students, faculty, staff, accessibility service providers, health professionals, and the public about the essential skills and abilities expected of candidates in Physical Therapy/Physiotherapy (PT) entry-to-practice programs. (Physical Therapy and Physiotherapy are interchangeable in Canada. The terms “Physiotherapist” and “Physical Therapist” are equivalent under the law in Ontario and other jurisdictions in Canada. Three of five Ontario academic programs lead to a degree in “Physical Therapy” and two lead to a degree in “Physiotherapy”). The purposes of the Essential Skills and Abilities document are to:

- provide information to prospective PT candidates so they can make an informed choice regarding applying to a program;
- help guide PT candidate, faculty and staff efforts toward student achievement of the essential skills and abilities;
- help prospective and current candidates decide if they should register with student accessibility services;
- help candidates, student accessibility advisors, faculty, staff and health professionals develop reasonable accommodations such that candidates may meet the ESA requirements;
- help ensure the safety of learners during the education program
- help ensure the safety of patients/clients during student clinical encounters.

The Ontario University programs in Physical Therapy / Physiotherapy are responsible to society for ensuring enrolled students develop the qualifications (academic knowledge, professional behaviours, attitudes and clinical skills) to enter the profession of Physical Therapy in Ontario.

The competency standards for Physical Therapy are described in the *Essential Competency Profile for Physiotherapists in Canada* (a foundational document that describes the essential competencies, [knowledge, skills, attitudes] required by physiotherapists practicing in Canada, at the beginning of and throughout their career. The document was developed and revised in 2009 through the collaboration of the National Physiotherapy Advisory Group [Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators, the Accreditation Council for Canadian Physiotherapy Academic Programs, the Canadian Physiotherapy Association and the Canadian Council of Physiotherapy

University Programs]. The document is available for download from <http://www.physiotherapyeducation.ca/Resources/Essential%20Comp%20PT%20Profile%202009.pdf>). Physical Therapy (PT) graduates must be able to determine a physical therapy diagnosis, complete client assessments, provide interventions within the PT scope of practice, and deliver comprehensive, compassionate care for clients with a wide variety of health conditions. (A complete client is a person, family, group, community or organization that receives physiotherapy professional services, products or information. A client may also be known as a patient. From: <http://www.peac-aepec.ca/pdfs/Accreditation/Accreditation%20Standards/FINAL%20PEAC%20STANDARDS%202012.pdf>.) In addition, students must be able to demonstrate sound clinical and professional judgment and responsible decision making while cognizant of practice accountability issues, laws, regulations, professional codes of ethics and standards of practice. For this reason, students in the PT program must possess the necessary cognitive, communication, sensory, motor, and psychosocial skills and behaviours to competently interview, assess, treat and educate clients, and to complete certain technical procedures, in a reasonable timeframe to ensure client safety.

In addition to obtaining a degree in Physical Therapy from an accredited program, an individual must pass the Physiotherapy Competency Examination (PCE) in order to obtain registration/licensure as a Physiotherapist in most jurisdictions in Canada. The PCE has two components: Written and Clinical. Prospective candidates should be aware that the Clinical Component requires candidates to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and behaviours in communication, physical examination, analysis, evaluation, and intervention planning and execution all in timed simulations of patient encounters. (For more information about the national Physiotherapy Competency Examination, consult the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators at [http://www.alliancept.org/exams\\_candidates\\_overview.php](http://www.alliancept.org/exams_candidates_overview.php).)

An offer of admission to a Physical Therapy program should not be interpreted as evidence that the Physical Therapy program has independently verified an applicant's skills and attributes in the domains described below. All students must have the required skills and attributes described in the *Section on Technical Standards*. These skills and attributes are essential if a student is to be successful in achieving the competency standards of the PT profession.

All individuals are expected to review this document to assess their ability to meet these technical standards. This policy does not preclude individuals with disabilities – see section on Students with Disabilities, below. Students who anticipate requiring disability-related accommodation are responsible for notifying the PT program after acceptance into the program.

Because of the comprehensive, additive and integrative nature of physical therapy curricula, students are expected to complete the PT degree within the timeline set out by a particular PT program. Students with a disability may be granted an extension of time within which to complete the program. These requests are considered on a case-by-case basis, and consideration may be University and program specific. Applicants

should seek out and review the policies, procedures and regulations regarding accommodation at the university(ies) and program(s) to which they are applying. If admitted to a program, students will be required to follow the policies, procedures and regulations of the university and faculty/school within which the program is located.

**Technical Standards:** Description of the Skills and Attributes for Students in a Master's-level program in Physical Therapy

### **Psychosocial**

Students must demonstrate sensitivity, compassion, integrity, and concern for others. Students must have the cognitive abilities to understand and develop the theoretical knowledge and technical expertise to work collaboratively with their peers, patients, and colleagues. Students must be respectful of individuality and diversity, be able to build trusting relationships, demonstrate excellent interpersonal skills to engage and motivate clients/patients and families, demonstrate creative problem solving skills and be able to effectively manage multiple, potentially competing demands.

Students must consistently demonstrate the resilience required for full utilization of their intellectual abilities, in the context of the physical, emotional, cognitive and mental demands of the program. Students must demonstrate adaptability to changing environments and the ability to function effectively and independently under stress. The development of mature, sensitive and effective relationships with clients, families and other members of the health care team is also required. Students must consistently demonstrate the resilience and balance to manage a myriad of emotionally charged or ethically challenging scenarios that frequently arise in all work settings.

### **Information gathering**

Students must gather information. This visual, auditory and tactile information is gathered through observation, communication and palpation. Gathering information also includes reading medical records or other written documentation, use of assessment tools and measures, and communicating with members of the health care team.

### **Communication**

Students must be able to adequately communicate and observe clients in order to effectively and efficiently elicit information, describe mood, activity, posture(s) and non-verbal communication. Students must be able to communicate effectively and sensitively with clients, families and members of the health care team. Students must be able to coherently summarize a client's condition, and assessment and intervention plan verbally and in text (handwritten or electronic) to comply with regulatory and organizational record-keeping standards.

The level of communication fluency for PT students is often higher than is generally assessed in standard tests of language fluency. Students with less than full fluency in the principal language of the Physical Therapy Program are responsible for achieving

the high level of communication ability that is required for patient safety, informed consent and fully competent, independent, and ethical interaction with patients.

### **Critical thinking and Cognition**

Students must demonstrate the cognitive skills and memory necessary to measure, calculate, and reason in order to analyze, integrate and synthesize information. In addition, students must be able to comprehend multidimensional and spatial relationships. These comprehensive problem solving activities must be done in an acceptable timeframe to ensure client safety. Students also need to be able to demonstrate the ability to accurately evaluate their own performance to identify learning gaps and to further direct their learning. Effective problem solving and judgment are necessary to address client needs, and engage the client in a safe and efficient manner. Students must have critical appraisal skills in order to build a foundation for evidence-based practice. Students must demonstrate these critical thinking skills in their course work both in the university-based and clinical environment.

### **Psychomotor/Physical**

Students must demonstrate sufficient motor function to safely perform initial and ongoing assessments and interventions, including collecting data and assessment tests and measures. Motor function should be sufficient to allow completion of tasks in a timely manner, to ensure client safety. Students must be able to use common diagnostic aids or instruments either directly or in an adaptive form (e.g., sphygmomanometer, stethoscope, goniometer) and provide the necessary physical guidance for exercise and/or functional movement by instruction or demonstration. Students must be able to execute motor movements reasonably in order to ensure patient safety and treatment effectiveness, either through the students' own movement or through their ability to guide or direct the movement of others. In addition, students must be able to physically participate in all learning experiences of the educational program (e.g., for clinical skills laboratory work).

### **Students with Disabilities**

Ontario's Physical Therapy/Physiotherapy programs are committed to ensuring that students are afforded an academic environment that is dedicated to the advancement of learning and that is based on the principles of equitable access and individual dignity; as such, they are committed to facilitating the integration of students with disabilities into the University community. Their Faculties/Schools also strive to preserve the academic integrity of the University and the program by affirming that all students satisfy the essential requirements of the program and program courses.

Each student with a disability is entitled to reasonable accommodation that will assist her/him to meet the program standards and academic requirements. Reasonable accommodation cannot compromise the essential requirements of a program or client/patient safety and well-being. The purpose of a reasonable accommodation is to

ensure the student with a disability has the same opportunity as his/her student peers to attain the required operational level, but is not meant to guarantee success in the program.

Exploring reasonable accommodation options may involve the exercise of flexibility by both the University and the student with a disability, while maintaining the academic and technical standards and requirements of the program. The student with a disability must be able to demonstrate the requisite knowledge and behaviours, and perform the necessary skills independently and safely. In rare circumstances an intermediary may be appropriate. Instances when an intermediary may not be appropriate include, for example, where the intermediary has to provide cognitive support; or is a substitute for cognitive skills; or is solely conducting an assessment or treatment; or supplements clinical reasoning or judgment. The appropriateness of an intermediary will be assessed on a case by case basis.

Before accepting an offer of admission, students who may require disability related accommodations are strongly advised to review the policies, procedures, and regulations regarding accommodations and consult with the University's student accommodation services and the Faculty/School making the offer. Please note that certain accommodations obtained in previous educational settings may not be appropriate, particularly with respect to clinical requirements. If admitted, students will be required to follow the policies and procedures of the University and Faculty/School within which the program is located.

**Note:** Specific PT programs in Ontario may have additional program specific essential requirements.

*Essential Skills and Attributes Required for the Study of Physical Therapy/Physiotherapy, OCUPRS approved December 2018*