General Description
Physical therapists are evidence-based, healthcare professionals who diagnose and treat individuals of all ages who have medical problems or other health-related conditions that limit their abilities to move and perform functional activities in their daily lives. They offer cost-effective treatment that improves mobility and relieves pain, reduces the need for surgery and prescription drugs, and allows patients to participate in a recovery plan designed for their specific needs. In addition, physical therapist work with individuals to prevent the loss of mobility before it occurs by developing fitness and wellness-oriented programs for healthier and more active lifestyles. Physical therapists provide care for people in a variety of settings, including hospitals, private practices, outpatient clinics, home health agencies, schools, sports and fitness facilities, work settings, and nursing homes. State licensure is required in each state in which a physical therapist practices.

What are some common daily activities/experiences?
As essential participants in the health care delivery system, physical therapists assume leadership roles in rehabilitation, prevention, health maintenance, and programs that promote health, wellness, and fitness. Physical therapists also play important roles both in developing standards for physical therapy practice and in developing health care policy to ensure availability, accessibility, and optimal delivery of health care services.

As clinicians, physical therapists engage in an examination process that includes:

- Taking the patient’s medical history,
- Reviewing the medications, test results, and notes from other healthcare provides,
- Conducting a systems review, and
- Performing tests and measures to identify potential and existing problems.

To establish diagnoses, prognoses, and plans of care, physical therapists perform evaluations, synthesizing the examination data and determining whether the problems to be addressed are within the physical therapy scope of practice. Physical therapists typically do the following:

- Diagnose patients’ functions and movements by observing them stand, walk or perform activities/tasks, perform various tests and measures, and by listening to their concerns.
- Design individualized plans of care based on their medical expertise, best available research, the patients’ unique situations and goals, and the expected outcomes of the plans.
- Use techniques such as exercises, hands-on therapy, and equipment to ease patients’ pain, help them increase their mobility, prevent further pain or injury, and facilitate health and wellness.
- Evaluate a patients’ progress, modify their plans of care, when necessary, to try new treatments.
- Educate patients and their families about what to expect and how best to cope with a recovery process.
- Develop and implement discharge plans.

A few of the health conditions commonly treated by physical therapists are as follows:

- Arthritis
- Back & Neck Pain
- Brain Injury
- Cancer-Related Complications
- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
- Cerebral Palsy
- Chronic Pain
- Cystic Fibrosis
- Diabetes
- Fall Risk & Balance Issues
- Fibromyalgia
- Fractures & Multiple Trauma
- Incontinence
- Joint Injuries, including to Knee & Ankle
- Lymphedema
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Muscle Strains
- Obesity
- Osteoporosis
- Parkinson's Disease
- Pelvic Pain
- Plantar Fasciitis
- Post-Operative Rehabilitation
- Rotator Cuff Injuries
- Spinal Cord Injuries & Birth Defects
- Sports Injuries
- Wound & Burn Care
The practice of physical therapists varies by type of patient. For example, a patient experiencing loss of mobility due to stroke needs different care from that given to an athlete recovering from an injury. Some physical therapists specialize in one type of care, such as orthopedics or geriatrics. Many physical therapists also help to prevent loss of mobility by developing fitness and wellness programs to encourage healthier and more active lifestyles.

Physical therapists practice as part of a healthcare team, overseeing the work of physical therapist assistants and aides; and consulting with physicians, surgeons and other specialists. In addition, some physical therapists are educators, researchers, consultants, or healthcare administrators. They may practice in government agencies, healthcare industries, schools, and other public/private institutions.

What are 3-5 personal characteristics important for happiness and success in your profession?

- **Compassion.** Physical therapists are often drawn to the profession in part by a desire to help people. They often work with people who are in pain or have been through traumatic events and they must have empathy for their patients.
- **Detail-oriented.** Like other healthcare providers, physical therapists should have strong analytical and observational skills to diagnose a patient’s problem, evaluate treatments, and provide safe, effective care.
- **Dexterity.** Physical therapists must use their hands to provide manual therapy and therapeutic exercises. They should feel comfortable touching and physically assisting patients.
- **Interpersonal skills.** Physical therapists spend a significant amount of time interacting with patients and other healthcare providers, and enjoy working with people from various and diverse backgrounds. They must be able to clearly explain treatment programs, motivate and listen to patients’ concerns, and communicate with the healthcare team to provide effective therapy.
- **Physical stamina.** Physical therapists spend much of their time on their feet, moving as they work with patients. They should enjoy physical activity.
- **Resourcefulness.** Physical therapists customize treatment plans for patients. They must be flexible and able to adapt plans of care to meet the needs of each patient.

What are 3-5 key questions students should be asking themselves as they prepare for your profession?

- Are you interested in how the human body works and moves?
- Do you want to interact directly with patients and their families or caregivers?
- Are you interested in a hands-on career?
- Are you an effective communicator?
- Do you have good interpersonal skills?
- Can you motivate people?
- Do you excel in science?

Preparing for Admission:

- **Academics:** Physical therapist education programs in the United States only offer the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) degree to all new students who enroll. Most DPT education programs require applicants to earn a bachelor’s degree prior to admission into the professional phase of the program. Other programs offer a 3+3 curricular format in which 3 years of specific pre-professional (undergraduate/pre-PT) courses must be taken before the student can advance into a 3-year professional DPT program. A few programs recruit all or a portion of students directly from high school into a guaranteed freshman admissions program. High school students accepted into these programs can automatically advance into the professional phase of the program pending the
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completion of specific undergraduate courses and any other stated contingencies (eg, minimum GPA). (View the Physical Therapist (PT) Admissions Process for more detailed information)

DPT programs may require preprofessional (pre-PT/undergraduate) science courses to be completed in a 4-year university/college within the 5-10 years prior to enrollment. Students should be prepared to identify the classes completed or planned that will fulfill the program’s course requirements. Some programs only accept anatomy or physiology courses completed in a biology, neuroscience, anatomy, or integrated physiology department. Programs may not accept a combined anatomy and physiology (A&P) course or those completed in other departments, such as kinesiology. Visit the PTCAS directory to determine what type of anatomy and physiology courses are required for admission. See also the Course Prerequisite Summary.

There is no preferred major to be eligible for admission to a DPT program. The most common undergraduate majors among accepted applicants include exercise science, biology, kinesiology, and psychology. In selecting a college major, students should consider how they will satisfactorily complete the prerequisite courses for the designated physical therapist programs in addition to the college/university’s degree and major requirements. For additional information about college majors for the most recent applicant pool, review the PTCAS Applicant Data Report and the PTCAS Course Prerequisite Summary:

- **Standardized Tests:** Most programs require the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) for admission and have established a PTCAS GRE Code for the reporting of scores. [http://www.ptcas.org/Tests/](http://www.ptcas.org/Tests/)

- **Experience/Exposure:** Many programs require applicants to have a certain number of volunteer or paid experiences working with patients under the supervision of a licensed physical therapist. The program may specify the settings and types of experiences required. Applicants may also be required to have a licensed physical therapist verify the hours. This experience may be an important factor in the admissions process. Students should respectfully contact physical therapy clinics, hospitals, long-term care facilities (eg, nursing homes), and other healthcare settings in the area to find observation opportunities. APTA cannot assist in these efforts. See also the Physical Therapist Observation Hours.

- **Letters of Reference:** Many programs require 1-4 letters of letters of reference as part of the admissions process. Programs may require references from a particular individual, such as a physical therapist, science professor, or academic advisor. If references are required, select individuals who meet the program’s requirements; know the student well; and can speak to maturity, dependability, dedication, compassion, communication skills, leadership, and any hands-on experience in the field. See also Reference Requirements by Program Summary and the reference instructions.


**The Admissions Cycle:**

- **CAS(es):** Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service (PTCAS) [www.ptcas.org](http://www.ptcas.org)
  - **Application opens:** early July 2016
  - **Application can be submitted:** July 2016-May 2017
  - **Number of schools participating:** 212
  - **Fees:** $145 to apply to one program, $45 for each additional
  - **Fee waivers:** A limited number of PTCAS application fee waivers are available. Waivers are granted to financially disadvantaged applicants on a first-come, first-serve basis. PTCAS will decide if applicants qualify for a fee waiver based on their income, or their parent’s income,

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if claimed as a dependent, as reported on the most recent federal income tax return. No other documentation is accepted. Applicants who receive a fee waiver may apply to one DPT program in PTCAS for free. If they choose to apply to more than one program, they will pay a fee of $45 for each additional designation.

- **Letters of reference logistics:** Applicants can request up to four letters of reference via PTCAS. PTCAS will automatically e-mail the evaluator once the reference request is saved on the application. Evaluators should watch for an e-mail from noreply@ptcas.org with the subject heading "PTCAS Reference Request". PTCAS will only accept electronic references in the 2016-2017 cycle and will not accept paper or uploaded references. Reference requirements vary by program. Visit the PTCAS directory for details.
  
  http://www.ptcas.org/ProgramPrereqs/

- **Standardized test logistics:** There is no GRE code for PTCAS. Instead, applicants must arrange for the Educational Testing Service (ETS) to send official GRE scores to the correct GRE code for each designated program. Most programs have a PTCAS GRE code that differs from the main university code. http://www.ptcas.org/Tests/

- **Transcripts:** Official US transcripts should be sent to PTCAS with a transcript matching form.

- **Instruction manual and FAQ:** http://www.ptcas.org/ApplicationInstructions/Document/

- **Contact information:** 617-612-2040, ptcasinfo@ptcas.org

- **CAS contact for advisors:** Libby Ross, director of academic services, APTA, libbyross@apta.org.

- **PTCAS on Facebook:** https://www.facebook.com/PTCAS

- **PTCAS on Twitter:** http://twitter.com/PTCAS

  - **Advisor portal:**

  - **Approximate dates of interviews, offers:** Varies by DPT program.

**The Admissions Process:**

- **Total number of applicants in most recent cycle:** 18,479 in PTCAS
- **Average # of applications per student:** 6.17 in PTCAS
- **Total number of first year students (through CAS and all if known):** ~10000
- **Test score and GPA averages and ranges, other data on applicants:** The 2015-2016 PTCAS Applicant Data Report will be available in November 2016.
- **Total number of students:** 28,514

**Learn More about the Profession**

**Training & Career Opportunities**

- **Number of years:** 3 years of graduate education.
- **Degree attained:** Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) degree
- **Total number of graduates in most recent academic year:** 8,806
- **Data on employment of recent graduates:** Not available

**Key Resources for Prospective Students**

- APTA Information for Prospective Students:

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• Move Forward: Physical Therapy Brings Motion to Life
• Why I Chose a Career in Physical Therapy” (video)

Key Resources for Health Professions Advisors
• Cultural Competence in Physical Therapy: www.apta.org/CulturalCompetence/

Social Media
• APTA on Facebook:
  ▪ http://www.facebook.com/APTAfans
  ▪ https://www.facebook.com/MoveForwardPT
• APTA on Twitter
  ▪ https://twitter.com/aptatweets
  ▪ https://twitter.com/MoveForwardPT

Advisory Council Professional Association Partner Information
• American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), www.apta.org
• Mission: The mission of the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), the principal membership organization representing and promoting the profession of physical therapy, is to further the profession’s role in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of movement dysfunctions and the enhancement of the physical health and functional abilities of members of the public.
• Vision Statement: Transforming society by optimizing movement to improve the human experience.
• Size of organization: The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) is an individual membership professional organization representing more than 90,000 member physical therapists (PTs), physical therapist assistants (PTAs), and students of physical therapy. There are currently more than 180 staff members at APTA.
• Number of member institutions: There are currently 233 DPT education programs accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE).
• New institutional members in last two years: See also the CAPTE Directory.
  o Adventist U of Health Sciences
  o Alvernia U
  o Brenau U
  o Briar Cliff U
  o Campbell U
  o Concordia U-Saint Paul
  o DeSales U
  o Emory & Henry College
  o High Point U
  o Indiana State U
  o Kean U
  o Mary Baldwin College
  o Methodist U
  o Samford U
  o South College
  o Trine U
  o U of Arkansas for Medical Sciences
  o U of Mary Hardin-Baylor
  o U of Mount Union
  o West Coast U
  o William Carey U
  o Wingate U

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