

MISERICORDIA UNIVERSITY
Physical Therapy Department

Essential Functions for the Student Physical Therapist

These essential functions are the activities that a student physical therapist must be able to perform, with or without reasonable accommodations, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for successful completion of the professional curriculum. They are applicable in the classroom, laboratories, simulated clinical experiences and while on clinical education assignments. Independent clinical education sites are used that may or may not be willing or able to offer the same reasonable accommodations that are made available by the University.

The student physical therapist must have the physical, cognitive and affective capacity, with or without reasonable accommodations, in the following areas to safely and successfully complete the requirements of the curriculum:

Motor

Physical therapy students must possess a variety of gross and fine motor skills with coordination sufficient to perform patient examinations and interventions in a variety of settings. Students must be able to:

- Assume and maintain a variety of positions including sitting for up to 2 hours continuously, frequent standing, walking, bending, squatting, kneeling, stair climbing, reaching forward, reaching overhead, turning and movement of neck and trunk in all directions

- Perform manual material handling and manipulation of various sizes and weights including lifting and transferring patients, guarding patients during gait training on level surfaces/uneven surfaces/ramps/stairs, pushing and pulling to provide resistance and to assist in maneuvering patients. Specific requirements include:
 - Safely lift up to 50 lbs. independently
 - Safely lift up to 200 lbs. with assistance
 - Safely push and pull up to 200 lbs.
 - Occasionally carry up to 25 lbs. while walking up to 50ft.
 - Occasionally crawl, reach above shoulder level and kneel.
 - Frequently change position and location at speeds that permit safe handling of patients/clients.

- Demonstrate a firm, reassuring bilateral grasp during joint mobilization/manipulation and manually resistance exercise, bilateral gross and fine motor control and strength to perform therapeutic /massage, fine motor control to manipulate testing instruments/equipment/writing instruments/computers.

- Manually palpate various body structures during examination and intervention procedures.
- Balance self and provide support and balance for patients on a variety of surfaces including level and uneven ground, ramps, curbs and stairs.
- Demonstrate the ability to position oneself in front of a screen for typing, viewing, reading, and using the computer for up to 50 minute intervals.
- Have sufficient endurance to continue performing a variety of exertional activities for up to 8-12 hours with occasional rest breaks.
- Respond quickly to emergency situations by lifting/pushing/pulling patients, applying force to perform CPR and assist with transporting patients.
- Have adequate endurance for travel to clinical education sites as assigned.

Sensory Abilities

Includes the ability to perceive all information necessary for effective patient/client management inclusive of functional use of visual, hearing and tactile sensations.

- Visual observation of:
 - Audiovisual presentations and written materials in lecture
 - Laboratory demonstrations and procedures
 - Patient/clients (at a distance and close at hand)
 - Treatment equipment, inclusive of textual and graphic readouts, and environment (at a distance and close at hand)
- Auditory ability for:
 - Effective auscultation/auditory evaluation inclusive of but not limited to: lungs, heart, apical pulse, blood pressure, joint noises, and prostheses.
 - Environmental cues inclusive of phones, overhead paging systems, equipment safety alarm signals, and verbal communication in a setting with competing ambient noise.
- Tactile ability for:
 - Appropriate feedback related to safe application of gradient pressures during examination and intervention, including palpation, manual muscle testing, joint mobilization, percussion, massage.
 - Appropriate feedback for manipulation of dials, sensors, switches on all examination and therapeutic equipment.

Cognitive Processing

Physical therapy students must possess sufficient intellectual-conceptual ability that includes the capacity to use integrative and quantitative abilities and make decisions. Students must be able to:

- Receive, remember, analyze, interpret, evaluate, and synthesize information from multiple sources, in a timely fashion.
- Attend to multiple tasks throughout the day of scheduled classes and clinical education experiences.
- Organize and prioritize information to make safe, appropriate and timely decisions regarding patient for the purpose of further examination, intervention, or referral.
- Problem solve, recognize deviations from the norm, formulate evaluations, and derive clinical judgments from information collected, in a timely fashion.
- Observe and accurately interpret patient responses and adjust examination and/or intervention as indicated by patient response.
- Acknowledge limitations of knowledge and/or performance in order to provide safe, effective patient care including the necessity of referring the patient/client to other healthcare professionals.

Maintain Safety

Physical therapy students must possess sufficient intellectual-conceptual ability to maintain a safe environment for students, faculty, patients, and colleagues. Students must be able to:

- Recognize and respond appropriately and in a timely manner to a medical emergency.
- Recognize and react in a timely manner to changes in environment that may result in injury or harm to students, faculty, patients, and colleagues.
- Recognize and react in a timely manner to changes in a patient's status that may result in injury or harm to students, faculty, patients, and colleagues.
- Recognize and react in a timely manner to personal limitations that may result in injury or harm to students, faculty, patients, and colleagues.

Communication

Use appropriate verbal, nonverbal and written communication with all individuals when engaged in physical therapy practice.

- Verbal:
 - Establish rapport with clients, patients and colleagues.
 - Express own ideas and feelings clearly and demonstrate a willingness and ability to give and receive feedback.
 - Receive and send verbal communication in emergency situations in a timely manner within the acceptable norms of clinical settings

- Communicate clearly and audibly during interactions with classmates, professors, patients and members of the healthcare team.
- Answer calls, make calls and communicate needs on a telephone.
- Written:
 - Receive, write, and interpret written communication in both academic and clinical settings.
 - Read and record observations and plans legibly, efficiently and accurately in documents such as the patient's record, which may be written or electronic.
 - Complete written assignments and maintain written records, including both handwritten and electronic
- Non-Verbal:
 - Observe patients for the purposes of eliciting information and perceiving nonverbal communication; accurately describing changes in facial expression, mood, activity, and posture.
 - Recognize and promptly respond to emotional communications such as sadness, worry, agitation, pain and lack of comprehension of therapist communication.

Affective

Physical therapy students must possess the emotional health required for the full utilization of his/her intellectual abilities, the exercise of good judgment, practice in a professional and ethical manner, and the prompt and safe completion of all responsibilities needed for effective diagnoses and care of patients and families.

Students must be able to:

- Work with multiple patients/families/colleagues at the same time/
- Work with lab partners, patients, families, and others under stressful conditions, including but not limited to medically or emotionally unstable individuals, situations requiring rapid adaptations, the provision of CPR, or other emergency interventions.
- Recognize and respectfully respond appropriately to individuals of all ages, genders, races, socio-economic, religious, and cultural backgrounds.
- Maintain mature, sensitive, and effective relationships with patients, students, faculty, staff and other professionals in academic and clinical environments including highly stressful situations.
- Understand that his/her values, attitudes, beliefs, emotions, and experiences affect his/her perceptions and relationships with others.
- Demonstrate the ability to be self-reflective.
- Possess adequate endurance to tolerate physically, emotionally, and mentally taxing workloads and to function effectively under time constraints, proactively making use of available resources to help maintain both physical and mental health.
- Accept suggestions and criticisms and, if appropriate, to respond by modifying their behavior.

- Demonstrate appropriate assertiveness, delegate responsibilities, and function as a part of a physical therapy team.
- Display moral, ethical, and professional behaviors consistent with the APTA Core Values of Professionalism.

Adapted from:

- Physical Therapy Program, University of South Carolina, Essential Functions
- University of St. Augustine, Essential Functions for Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Orthopedic Physician Assistants.
- University of the Sciences, Philadelphia, Essential Functions