

# Career profile: physical therapy assistant



## Health Care Career: Physical Therapy Assistant

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### 1. Job Description

Physical therapy assistants (PTAs) offer care in varying forms including teaching clients/patients exercises for purposes of mobility, coordination and strength, training patients on how to use mobility aids such as walkers, cranes or crutches (American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), 2014). They also offer massage and train patients on the same as well as use of electrotherapy and physical agents such as electrical stimulation and ultrasound.

Therefore, PTAs usually offer physical therapy services while under the supervision and direction of licensed physical therapists. These services are offered to persons of different ages with medical conditions or problems or any other health-related condition, which limits their capability to move or undertake functional activities during their everyday lives (APTA, 2014). Additionally, PTAs also measure any changes in the performance of a patient due to the physical therapy that has been offered. Their work settings vary from outpatient clinics, hospitals, nursing homes, schools, home health to sports facilities and private practices.

The scope of practice for the PTAs as set by the APTA consists of examining patients and their histories, testing and measuring their strength, balance, range of motion, muscle performance, coordination, posture, motor function and respiration under the supervision and direction of a licensed PT (APTA, 2014). They may also be involved in implementing the various patients'

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treatment plans through the various modes of therapy to ensure continuity of care. With continuing treatment, progress is documented, and modifications may be made and implemented according to the PTs directions.

The standard code of ethics for PTAs as delineated by the House of Delegates of the APTA emphasizes the special obligation of a PTA to ensure that a patient achieves greater independence, wellness and health as well as improved life quality (APTA, 2008). This is achieved by respecting patients' rights and dignity, being compassionate and trustworthy, abiding by the law during decision-making and demonstrating integrity in their workplace. They should also enhance their competence by acquiring skills, knowledge and abilities.

## 2. Education, Registration and certification

A PTA education should be obtained from an accredited college or university after a two-year CAPTE-accredited associate degree. The program usually takes two years comprised of five semesters during which general education, clinical education and physical therapy courses are offered. The contents of primary physical therapy include although not limited to physiology and anatomy, biomechanics, kinesiology, exercise physiology, clinical pathology, neuroscience, behavioral sciences, ethics/values and communication (Education Portal, 2013). About 75 percent of a PTA curriculum is based on lab and classroom (didactic) study with the remaining 25 percent being dedicated for clinical education. A PTA student must also spend an average of 16 weeks on full-time experiences of clinical education.

Ideally, the whole program costs about 7, 816 dollars and 26, 493 dollars in tuition fees in public and private institutions annually respectively according to 2008 approximations. Upon completion of the PTA program, one is awarded an associate degree in Physical Therapy Assistant. In order to practice as a PTA, one ought to be registered, certified or licensed by the particular state he/she wishes to work in, which requires passing of the National Physical Therapy Exam (NPTE) (APTA, 2014). This exam is administered by the State Boards of Physical Therapy (FSBPT). Completion of continuing education is also necessary in order to ensure that certification or licensure is maintained. Besides, PTAs are expected to be CPR certified.

### 3. Employment

The job outlook for this career shows a high demand for PTAs within the healthcare workforce despite the downturn in the economy. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that there will be a 35 percent growth in PTA employment between 2008 and 2018, which is a much faster rate of growth than any other healthcare occupation as the demand for their services grows. For example, in the month of October there were 2500 PTA jobs advertised in LinkedIn. Apparently, there are jobs that require one to have some experience while others welcome even those without experience (Education Portal, 2013). Ideally, those with experience are more preferable due to the skills, knowledge and the abilities that they possess, which at the same time warrants a higher pay compared to those without experience. The latter definitely start with a lower remuneration.

Entry-level PTAs often start with a median salary of \$42, 100 although it may be as low as \$32, 420 while experienced PTAs earn a median salary of \$52, <https://assignbuster.com/career-profile-physical-therapy-assistant/>

160, which may rise up to about \$62,360. Usually, becoming a PTA is only a beginning because there are various opportunities for career development with or without advancement in education. One can advance knowledge and skills in one field out of the many that include geriatric, pediatric, cardiopulmonary, integumentary, musculoskeletal or neuromuscular (APTA, 2014). Fellowship programs enable one to obtain skills and knowledge in a physical therapy subspecialty. They usually require at least 1000 hours of clinical experience in three years or 36 months. One can as well advance by undertaking postprofessional degrees such as postdoctoral programs or postprofessional ScD and PhD programs.

#### 4. Professional Activities

APTA is the only professional body for physical therapists. In fact, PTA students can join and nationally the student 2014 membership charge stood at \$80 with variations from state to state (APTA, 2014). Various journals have been publishing research issues related to physical therapy including the Cardiopulmonary Physical Therapy Journal located in Caroline Street of St. Louis, MO, the Journal of Physical Therapy published in Mullana-Amabala, Haryana, India and the Journal of the American Physical Therapy published in Baltimore.

In most of the states, Continuing Educational Units (CEUs) are required for purposes of renewing practice licenses. CEUs are therefore required during every renewal with variations in the number of hours from state to state. For example, in the state of Alabama only 6 hours are required, 24 hours for Arkansas, none for Colorado, 20 hours for Illinois and 30 hours for Oklahoma among others (Arkansas State Board of Physical Therapy (ASBPT), 2014).

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These continuing education requirements can be met in various ways including taking or attending seminars or lectures related to the profession either in person or online. Courses may as well be offered by accredited professional organization on relevant topics (Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy, 2008). Similarly, promoting a profession to outside audiences may satisfy the continuing education requirement leading to earning of a CEU. Each CEU comprises of ten hours of taking part in recognized continuing education session with qualified sponsorship and instruction.

#### 5. Reflection/ Personal career Plan

I believe that I can fit in this career field because of my desire to work with and assist persons with functional problems or ill health, with the aim of assisting them achieve functional abilities. At the end of the therapeutic regime, we (patient and I) will be able to see the results culminating from our hard work, a sign of valuable contribution to the recovery of an individual as well as quality of his life (APATA, 2014). This is bound to give me great satisfaction in my career as a PTA. Besides, I am a compassionate, caring and kind person with a passion of helping people.

In order to be a professional PTA, my goal is to graduate as a competent entry-level PTA who functions effectively under supervision and direction of a licensed PT in the next two years. My learning objectives include acquiring knowledge, skills and abilities appropriate to enable practice as a PTA as well as to instill in me value-based behaviors required for the profession. Further, in order that I may achieve my career goals and objectives I should ensure that, I am good in mathematics and physical sciences such as Biology,  
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Chemistry and Anatomy among others (APTA, 2011). Besides, I will learn by example from my mentors, supervisors and senior students on the best PTA practices.

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