

Standards of physiotherapy

Guideline

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World Physiotherapy guidelines are produced to assist member organisations and others to raise the quality of physiotherapy. They may provide guidance on standards criteria or courses of action in areas relevant to physiotherapy education, research, practice, or policy. They are not mandatory but designed to assist the implementation of World Physiotherapy's policies.

Standards of physiotherapist practice

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This guideline for standards of physiotherapist practice provides details on the competence domains and the set of activities which World Physiotherapy expects physiotherapists to meet in order to provide competent, quality, and safe, professional physiotherapy services within a given context. This guideline also should facilitate the development and mobility of the global physiotherapy workforce.

These standards provide the foundation for the assessment of physiotherapy practice. They represent the physiotherapy profession's commitment to society to promote optimal health and function in individuals and populations by pursuing excellence in practice. These standards provide the basis for physiotherapy practice in all physical and virtual settings, including but not limited to clinics, hospitals, schools, and commercial premises.

The standards include eight unique domains identified for physiotherapy practice competence grounded within World Physiotherapy's policy statements. These domains and their accompanying set of activities can be found in Section 2.

The guideline has been informed by the Physiotherapist education framework 2021(1). It should be used in conjunction with the World Physiotherapy standards of physiotherapist practice policy statement (2). World Physiotherapy has other policies and guidelines that will assist physiotherapists in meeting a defined standard of competent physiotherapy services.

These World Physiotherapy policies and guidelines include:

- Description of physiotherapy policy (3)
- Education policy (4)
- Ethical principles and the responsibilities of physiotherapists and member organisations policy (5)
- Evidence-based practice policy (6)
- Physiotherapy documentation and records management policy and guideline (7)
- Quality services policy (8)
- Regulation of the physiotherapy practice policy (9)

1.2 Target audience

The standards have been developed with input from and specific reference to the member organisations (MOs) of World Physiotherapy. They are intended for use by:

- World Physiotherapy MOs
- potential World Physiotherapy MOs
- physiotherapy educators
- health and education authorities
- monitoring and regulatory bodies
- government policymakers
- by physiotherapists in countries/territories where a World Physiotherapy MO does not currently exist
- patients/patient/clients who are interested in standards of physiotherapist practice.

1.3 Application

The standards provided in this guideline are achievable physiotherapy standards of practice. They are presented as standards physiotherapists should follow as part of their professional responsibility. At the same time, it is recognised that some interpretation will be required based on the setting, resources, and support systems available. It is acknowledged that individual World Physiotherapy MOs may have their own more detailed standards of practice, and these are not intended to replace them.

The standards set out in this guideline apply to all physiotherapists throughout their career, in direct or indirect contact with patients/patient/clients, carers, and other professional colleagues. Physiotherapy practice is more than direct patient/patient/client contact, as reflected in these standards. It includes how services are structured, managed and delivered.

In Domain 5 of the physiotherapist education framework, on interprofessional teamwork, as detailed below, collaboration is essential to delivering quality physiotherapy services. Some of these standards cannot be achieved without collaboration with appropriate colleagues from other professions and health service managers.

2 Guideline

Domain

The below physiotherapy standards have been adapted from the physiotherapist education framework (1).

1. Physiotherapy assessment and intervention

Physiotherapists who meet World Physiotherapy standards are able to:

- 1.1 plan and conduct a structured, comprehensive person-centred assessment and physiotherapy examination of the patient/client, or needs of a patient/client group, including socio-economic, personal, and environmental factors, and screening for differential diagnosis
- 1.2 evaluate the findings from the assessment/examination to identify and prioritise patient/client problems and negotiate achievable and measurable functional and clinical outcomes
- 1.3 formulate a diagnosis to guide physiotherapists in determining the prognosis and most appropriate, evidence-based intervention/education strategies for patients/clients by using clinical reasoning, that results in the identification of existing or potential impairments, activity limitations, participation restrictions, environmental influences or abilities/disabilities
- 1.4 establish person-centred goals and develop an individualised plan of evidence-based intervention using a context specific, active, functional rehabilitation approach in full collaboration with the patient/client/carers
- 1.5 safely and effectively implement physiotherapy interventions, making appropriate use of technologies to restore integrity of body systems essential to movement; to maximise function and recuperation; to minimise incapacity; and to enhance quality of life, physical and mental health, wellbeing, independent living and workability in individuals and groups with altered movement behaviours resulting from impairments, activity limitations, participatory restrictions or disabilities through:
 - therapeutic exercise
 - functional training in self-care and home management
 - functional training work, community, and leisure
 - manual therapy techniques (including mobilisation/manipulation)
 - prescription, application, and, as appropriate, fabrication of devices and equipment (assistive, adaptive, orthotic, protective, supportive, and prosthetic)

- airway clearance techniques
 - integumentary/dermatology repair and protection techniques
 - electrotherapeutic modalities
 - physical agents and mechanical modalities
 - patient/client-related instruction
 - health promotion and prevention of impairments, activity limitations, participatory restrictions, and disabilities in individuals at risk of altered movement behaviours due to health, socio-economic, environmental, and lifestyle factors
 - modifying environmental, home and work access, and barriers to ensure full participation in individuals' societal roles
- 1.6 regularly monitor, measure, record, and evaluate the outcomes of intervention using valid and reliable measures and, if necessary, make modifications to the planned intervention
- 1.7 judge the need for referral or discharge if the diagnostic process reveals findings that are not within the scope of the physiotherapist's knowledge, experience or expertise; refer the patient/client to another appropriate practitioner and facilitate transition from physiotherapy to the care of another professional; or discharge, securing optimal social participation for the patient/patient/client
- 1.8 deliver services in the most appropriate and safe setting (for example, clinic, community, home, school); via the most appropriate mode (for example, in person or digitally); considering the circumstances (for example, socio-economic status, family situation) and potential systemic barriers (for example, disability, gender, age, race, ethnicity, geographic location); and including whether a direct physical examination is required, and whether a patient/client is able to receive care in a specific setting, or remotely

2 Ethical and professional practice

Physiotherapists who meet World Physiotherapy standards are able to:

- 2.1 comply with the laws and regulations governing the practice of physiotherapy as an autonomous profession, and the relevant statutory, ethical and professional codes, standards, guidelines and policies of their professional associations and regulatory bodies in the country in which they practise; and to report any observed unethical behaviours/practice by others - this includes digital practice, digital data protection and the use of social media
- 2.2 practise using a culturally-competent, person-centred approach with respect for all forms of inclusion, diversity, dignity, privacy, autonomy, and human rights of the patient/client, or legal guardian, who is seeking services regardless of whether the services are provided in person or remotely
- 2.3 practise within their own scope of practice; provide honest, competent and accountable professional services; and recognise the limitations of their own competence and ensure to work within it; refuse to work outside of their own competence, if requested to do so; and to accept responsibility for the exercise of sound professional judgement
- 2.4 place the needs and interests of the patient/client at the centre of their practice; provide fair, equitable, inclusive, and empowering quality services and ensure their own needs and interests as a physiotherapist do not compromise practice; charge and receive a just and fair level of remuneration for their services
- 2.5 obtain informed consent prior to intervention and respect the right of the patient/client to refuse intervention
- 2.6 recognise clinical and environmental risk, manage risk responsibly and effectively, and advocate for the right of physiotherapists to work in a safe and healthy practice environment that assures their own health and safety as well as that of their patient/clients

- 2.7 advocate for improved societal health and wellness of individuals, the general public, and society, emphasising the importance of physical activity and exercise and the facilitation of such activities, and for the inclusion of both the patient/client's and physiotherapist's perspective in decision-making
- 2.8 engage actively in anti-corruption, global health, and human rights-based approaches

3 Communication

Physiotherapists who meet World Physiotherapy standards are able to:

- 3.1 communicate clearly, accurately, understandably, effectively in a culturally-competent manner to create trust and an appropriate environment for physiotherapy intervention, empowerment, and collaboration to enable good outcomes, both in person and when working remotely
- 3.2 maintain accurate, clear, and timely records of assessment, decision-making, interventions, and outcomes and share with other professionals as appropriate; coordinate communication and documentation in line with legal, national, and local requirements for documentation and record keeping
- 3.3 provide accurate and appropriate information about physiotherapy to patient/clients, to other agencies and to the community
- 3.4 demonstrate reflective listening and negotiating skills to develop trust and to enhance relationships and outcomes with patients, patient/clients, and other colleagues, adjusting approaches as required to meet the situation

4 Evidence based practice

Physiotherapists who meet World Physiotherapy standards are able to:

- 4.1 apply a critical understanding of the research literature and use the best available evidence and new knowledge to inform and adapt practice to ensure it is safe and effective
- 4.2 identify clear, focused questions arising from practice that may serve as stimuli for future research
- 4.3 contribute to professional practice through research according to recognised standards and ethical practices, and research dissemination, appreciating the inter-dependence of practice, research, and education within the profession

5 Interprofessional practice

Physiotherapists who meet World Physiotherapy standards are able to:

- 5.1 engage in respectful, collaborative practice within multidisciplinary and interprofessional teams to optimise measurable clinical outcomes and to promote a positive, individualised, patient/client experience through the whole health and social care pathway; work within, and beyond, traditional professional boundaries (for example, skill sharing); collaborate with other health professionals and key stakeholders
- 5.2 work collaboratively with other members of multidisciplinary and interprofessional teams, and with patient/clients, families, and caregivers to determine needs and to formulate goals for physiotherapy intervention
- 5.3 teach and mentor colleagues

6 Reflective practice and lifelong learning

Physiotherapists who meet World Physiotherapy standards are able to:

- 6.1 identify individual learning needs by assessing one's own practice against peers and benchmarks, and set realistic learning goals

- 6.2 construct and implement a personal development plan and engage in continuing professional development
- 6.3 reflect on practice and seek support where needed to improve and develop one's own personal and professional efficacy and effectiveness
- 6.4 identify learning needs related to the use of technology in physiotherapy including new diagnostic, intervention, communication, and documentation tools addressing privacy, security, data storage, technology troubleshooting, and adverse events management

7 Quality assurance

Physiotherapists who meet World Physiotherapy standards are able to:

- 7.1 participate in organisational data collection, interpretation, and analysis to measure quantity and quality of outputs
- 7.2 engage with, and initiate, service improvement initiatives, including acting on feedback from patient/clients
- 7.3 utilise resources and technology efficiently to ensure their maximal impact on services

8 Leadership and management

Physiotherapists who meet World Physiotherapy standards are able to:

- 8.1 lead effectively and be led by others, as appropriate, and proactively model best professional values, and ethical behaviours
- 8.2 manage the complexity of working autonomously, within professional competence and scope, and be responsive to organisational management structures in a dynamic healthcare environment
- 8.3 interact with administrative and governance structures to inform, develop, and/or implement appropriate health policies and strategies, and contribute to the planning and development of services which address the health needs of individuals and the community
- 8.4 provide for the ongoing growth and development of the profession and for the identification of the unique contribution of physiotherapy and its evolving scope of practice
- 8.5 develop strategies to manage ambiguity, uncertainty, change, and stress to develop resilience and to manage physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing

Glossary <https://world.physio/resources/glossary>

Assessment

Interprofessional collaborative practice

Competence

Continuing professional development

Diagnosis

Documentation

Informed consent

Practice settings

Quality assurance

Reflective practice

Scope of practice

Service user

Standards of practice

Approval, review and related policy information	
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Related World Physiotherapy policies:	World Physiotherapy policy statements: • Quality services • Standards of physiotherapist practice • Relationship with other health professionals • Support personnel for physiotherapy practice • Description of physiotherapy • Documentation and records management Physiotherapist education framework

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