

**Physical Therapy Program  
Arnold School of Public Health  
University of South Carolina**

**Essential Functions**

It is the policy of the Physical Therapy Program at the University of South Carolina to provide *reasonable accommodations* for qualified students with disabilities so they can perform the essential functions required for graduation and the practice of physical therapy. The University of South Carolina Office of Student Disability Services and the Physical Therapy Program make the determination of *reasonable accommodation* jointly. If you need accommodations due to a disability please contact the Office of Student Disability Services at 803-777-6142.

**Essential Functions:**

The practice of physical therapy includes the examination, diagnosis, and treatment of people with physical disabilities, movement dysfunction, and pain. Physical therapists must be prepared to conduct in a timely manner a relevant patient examination, evaluate the results of this examination and synthesize these data to establish an accurate diagnosis, prognosis and plan of care, implement an intervention and use the process of re-examination to assess patient outcomes. Physical therapists must also possess the skills necessary to determine when referral of the patient/client to another health care professional is appropriate. Physical therapists must provide evidence that the care that they provide is effective, often through the conduct of clinically based research.

The Commission on Accreditation of Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) accredits professional physical therapy programs and requires that graduates of these programs be able to deliver entry-level clinical services. Graduates of entry-level programs are required to possess a broad base of knowledge and skills requisite for the practice of physical therapy. Physical therapists require the *intellectual - communication, behavioral – social, observational,* and *motor* abilities to meet the standard of practice.

Certain disabilities can interfere with a student's ability to complete the program of study and acquire the essential functions necessary for the practice physical therapy. *Reasonable accommodation* can be made to compensate for some limitations. However, those that interfere with patient care, safety or require the use of an intermediary may be incompatible with independent professional practice.

The Physical Therapy Program at the University of South Carolina has defined the essential functions of physical therapy as follows.

**Intellectual – Communication Abilities**

Intellectual skills include the abilities to recall and comprehend large amounts of didactic information and to apply this information to the examination, evaluation and management of routine and complex physical therapy problems. Effective communication skills enable the physical therapist to elicit appropriate information from patients and to effectively explain examination and treatment procedures.

Some of the skills an individual must be able to demonstrate include but are not limited to the ability to:

- Communicate clearly and in a timely manner with patients, physicians, other health professionals, community or professional groups, and colleagues.
- Report clearly, legibly, and in a timely manner through progress notes in patient charts, reports to physicians, insurance forms, and order forms.
- Respond to such things as a patient calling from behind a curtain, warning calls from anyone, and machine alarms.
- Participate in group meetings to deliver and receive information and to respond to questions from a variety of sources.

**Behavioral and Social Attributes**

Students must demonstrate the ability to practice in a professional and ethical manner and possess the emotional stability to practice in a stressful work environment. Compassion, integrity, concern for others, interpersonal skills, cultural competence and motivation are all personal attributes associated with the practice of physical therapy.

Some of the skills an individual must be able to demonstrate include but are not limited to the ability to:

- Recognize and respond appropriately to individuals of all ages, genders, races, socio-economic, religious, and cultural backgrounds.
- Cope with the stress of heavy work loads, demanding patients, and life threatening clinical situations.
- Recognize and respond appropriately to potentially hazardous situations.

**Observational Skills**

Observation is one of the key tools that a physical therapist possesses. To gather data on patient/client condition and to appropriately manipulate machinery are critical to being an effective physical therapist. Some of the skills an individual must be able to demonstrate include but are not limited to the ability to:

- Observe and interpret patient movement, skin condition, safety hazards, and changes in appearance.
- Read and interpret equipment dials, assessment graphs, patient charts, professional literature, and notes from patients, physicians, and other health professionals.

**Motor Skills**

The practice of physical therapy requires that the practitioner possess the ability to perform basic evaluative and therapeutic procedures that require specific physical skills and stamina (e.g. palpation, transfers, gait training). A therapist must be able to use vision and somatic sensation in the evaluation and treatment of patients. Some of the skills an individual must be able to demonstrate include but are not limited to the ability to:

- Lift, carry, and push patients (150 lbs.) in bed or wheelchairs, heavy equipment, body parts, and patients transferring from bed to chair or mat or be able to instruct others in the activity including proper body mechanics.
- Walk and balance well enough to help patients walk and transfer with or without equipment, and prevent injury to patient and self.
- Palpate anatomical structures and handle injured body parts without causing injury to the subject.
- Exhibit sufficient manual dexterity to manipulate very small equipment, provide support and resistance as needed through complex exercise movements, perform CPR, manipulate dials, and treat acutely ill patients without disturbing sensitive monitoring instruments and lines.
- Provide for the patient’s safety and well being in all therapeutic or transporting activities.

*I certify by my signature below, that I have read and understand the essential functions for the Physical Therapy Program at the University of South Carolina. I believe to the best of my knowledge that I meet these standards with or without reasonable accommodation. If you believe that you do not meet these essential functions please contact the University of South Carolina Office of Student Disability Services at 803-777-6142.*

*Signature of Applicant*

*Date*

***Please return this document in the enclosed self-addressed envelope***

This document compiled from Essential Functions Documents from Shenandoah University and the Medical College of Georgia.

Approved April 8, 2003