

ABILITIES AND SKILLS OF THE PHYSICAL THERAPIST ASSISTANT

The ASU Physical Therapist Assistant Program affirms that all students enrolled in a physical therapist assistant program must possess those intellectual, ethical, physical, and emotional capabilities required to undertake the full curriculum and to achieve the levels of competence required by the faculty for safe professional practice.

A student desiring to become a physical therapist assistant (candidate) must have the abilities and skills necessary for use of the physical therapy process. These skills and abilities include observation, communication, motor ability, conceptualization, integration and quantification, and behavioral/social acceptability. Technological compensation can be made for some handicaps in certain of these areas, but a candidate should be able to perform in a reasonably independent manner. The use of a trained intermediary is not acceptable because a candidate's judgment must not be mediated by someone else's power of observation and selection.

The following abilities and skills are necessary to meet the requirements of the curriculum:

Observation:

The candidate must be able to observe a patient accurately at a distance and close at hand. Observation necessitates the functional use of the sense of vision and tactile sensation. It is enhanced by the functional sense of smell.

Communication:

The candidate must be able to speak, hear, and to observe patients in order to elicit information, describe changes in mood, activity, and posture, and perceive nonverbal communications. A candidate must be able to communicate effectively and sensitively with patients. Communication includes not only speech, but also reading and writing. The candidate must be able to communicate effectively and efficiently in oral and written form with all members of the health care team.

Motor:

Candidates should have sufficient motor function to elicit information from patients by palpation, auscultation, percussion, and other assessment maneuvers. A candidate must have sufficient motor skill to gain access to clients in a variety of care settings and to manipulate the equipment central to the treatment of patients receiving physical therapy. Such actions require coordination of both gross and fine muscular movements, equilibrium, and functional use of the senses of touch and vision. Examples of required fine motor skills would include assessment of vital signs, application of dressings, debridement of wounds, tissue palpation and manual testing. Examples of required gross motor skills would include, but not be limited to, positioning clients in bed, gait training, transfer training, balance training, therapeutic exercise, and maneuvering in confined spaces. In addition, the candidate should be able to lift and carry a minimum of 35% of his or her own body weight. Also the candidate should be able to sit, bend, reach and/or walk and stand for most of the day.

Intellectual-Conceptual, Integrative, and Quantitative Abilities:

These abilities include measurement, calculation, reasoning, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Problem solving, the critical skill demanded of physical therapist assistants, requires all of these intellectual abilities. In addition, the candidate should be able to comprehend three-dimensional relationships and to understand the spatial relationships of structures.

Behavioral and Social Attributes:

A candidate must possess the emotional health required for full utilization of his or her intellectual abilities, the exercise of good judgment, the prompt completion of all responsibilities attendant to the care of patients, and the development of mature, sensitive, and effective relationships with patients and coworkers. Candidates must be able to tolerate physically taxing workloads and to function effectively under stress. They must be able to adapt to changing environments, to display flexibility, and to learn to function in the face of uncertainties inherent in the clinical problems of many patients. Compassion, integrity, concern for others, interpersonal skills, interests, and motivation are all personal qualities necessary for physical therapy.