

Physiotherapy Assistant

Introduction:

This document describes the key competencies (e.g. the knowledge, the skills and the attitudes) required by physiotherapy assistants in Capital District Health Authority (CDHA). The document reflects the diverse practice settings and roles in which physiotherapy assistants practice. It is not intended to be all inclusive or exhaustive. The context of the practice setting may further refine the role.

The purpose of the document is to:

- Support physiotherapy assistants in orientation by outlining practice expectations.
- Provide guidelines to assist physiotherapy assistants in decision making and self assessment as part of identifying ongoing learning needs.
- Inform the health care team*, administrators and others about what can be expected from this role.
- Provide a reference which may be used in conjunction with other resources to guide decisions around practice guidelines and delivery of physiotherapy services.

A number of assumptions were applied throughout the document:

- Reflects full scope of employment.
- Aligns with the CDHA's mission, vision and 'Our Promise'.
- Reflects provincial and national professional regulatory parameters.
- Respects discipline specific professional competencies, philosophies and language.
- Ensures that client safety is paramount.

The framework for the document was adapted from the CanMEDS Framework which was developed by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (Frank, 2005). The framework is thematically organized around seven roles: Expert, Communicator, Collaborator, Manager, Change Agent/Advocate, Scholarly Practitioner and Professional. While these roles are described as separate entities, it is recognized that they may overlap at any given time. The roles are broken down into key competencies which are the important outcome objectives (i.e. what is to be achieved or performed). The enabling competencies are the key ingredients to achieving the key competencies.

* Health care team includes patients, families and health care professionals.

Physiotherapy Assistants

Physiotherapy assistants are employed in a variety of practice settings. Their role is to work in conjunction with the physiotherapist in ensuring that physiotherapy services are delivered in a safe, effective and efficient manner.

Physiotherapy assistants:

- Have the education, knowledge and skill to carry out the assigned components of physiotherapy service and are accountable for their performance.
- Are responsible to know the purpose, risks, precautions, contraindications, and parameters of the assigned task and how it relates the patient's overall plan of care and discharge goals.
- Are responsible to self assess competencies and communicate learning needs.

Physiotherapy assistants provide care when:

- The physiotherapist has completed the initial assessment and the patient has given informed consent to physiotherapy treatment. Standardized outcome measures as part of the initial assessment can be assigned. The physiotherapist is accountable for the physiotherapy plan of care and must adhere to provincial standards of practice when assigning to a physiotherapy assistant.
- He/she has had communication with the physiotherapist and knows the relevant patient information – risks, precautions, contraindications, treatment parameters and discharge goals.
- He/she has the education, knowledge and experience to carry out the assigned tasks and is confident with the treatment, modality or tool to be used.
- He/she knows the purpose of the treatment and the expectations for the service (e.g. clinical pathways).

According to the Nova Scotia College of Physiotherapists Supervision and Task Assignment Practice Standard (2011), interventions which cannot be performed by a physiotherapy assistant are:

- Interpretation of referrals, diagnosis or prognosis
- Interpretation of assessment findings, treatment procedures and goals of treatment
- Planning or modification of treatment program beyond the established limits
- Discussion of treatment rationale, clinical findings and prognosis with patient or family
- Documentation that should be done by a physiotherapist
- Discharge planning
- Any tasks or procedure that required continuous clinical judgment e.g. any intervention that has an evaluative component that immediately influences the treatment program. This includes manual therapy e.g. mobilizations as indicated by the Canadian Association of Physiotherapy Regulators (2004) Guide on the Role and Utilization of Physical Therapist Support Workers in Physical Therapy in Canada.

Role 1: Expert in Function and Mobility

Physiotherapy assistants are skilled practitioners in function and mobility integrating all of their roles for the promotion, improvement, and maintenance of the mobility, health and well-being of their patients during performance of assigned tasks and within established guidelines and limits.*

*According to the Essential Competency Profile for Physiotherapists in Canada (2009) the goals of the physiotherapy service include:

- Promotion of physical activity and overall health and wellness
- Prevention of disease/injury/disability and mobility limitations
- Managing chronic conditions and activity limitations
- Restoration of function and rehabilitation of disease/injury/disability with therapeutic exercise programs and other interventions
- Counseling and planning of maintenance and support programs to prevent re-occurrence, reinjury or functional decline.

Key Competencies	Enabling Competencies
1.1 Support the physiotherapist who is the expert in function and mobility.	1.1.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the roles of various personnel involved in physiotherapy service delivery. 1.1.2 Demonstrate an understanding of person-centered care. 1.1.3 Demonstrate an understanding of physiotherapy practice and process. 1.1.4 Provide input to the physiotherapist on aspects of assessment, physiotherapy treatment plan, goal setting and discharge planning.
1.2 Work to enable function and mobility with specific populations in a range of practice contexts.	1.2.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the patient's physiotherapy plan. 1.2.2 Implement assigned interventions of the physiotherapy plan. 1.2.3 Establish positive therapeutic relationships with patients. 1.2.4 Observe, monitor and report the patient's performance. 1.2.5 Work effectively with individuals, families and groups. 1.2.6 Respond to changes in status of the patient. 1.2.7 Complete assigned data gathering elements using a range of tools to support the physiotherapy evaluation process.
1.3 Gather information and data related to the patient as assigned by the physiotherapist.	1.3.1 Complete assigned data gathering using a range of tools to support the physiotherapy evaluation. The outcome measures used may include but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goniometry

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berg balance test • Timed Up and Go (TUG) • Elderly Mobility Scale (EMS) • Functional Reach • 6 Minute Walk Test • Muscle strength testing e.g. manual muscle testing, use of dynamometer • Ambulation Profile <p>1.3.2 Monitor patient responses and status, before, during and after performance of assigned measures and tests.</p> <p>1.3.3 Report patient information to supplement the physiotherapist's assessment/ reassessment processes.</p> <p>1.3.4 Contribute to the development and revision of intervention activities within the physiotherapy plan.</p>
<p>1.4 Implement the interventions assigned by the physiotherapist.</p>	<p>1.4.1 Demonstrate understanding of the patient's intervention plan. The interventions which can be performed, but not limited to, are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobility training e.g. transfer, wheelchair skills • Gait training • Posture re-education • Electrical and thermal modalities • Hydrotherapy • Airway secretion clearance including manual percussion, postural drainage, Yankauer suctioning • Development of exercise program • Strengthening exercises • Balance exercises • Muscular and cardiovascular endurance training • Delivery of standardized education class • Active assisted and passive range of motion • Muscle stretching techniques • Fitting, application and progression of continuous passive motion machines • Functional activity training • Application of assistive devices/supportive and protective devices and equipment • Use of springs and slings and other equipment which eliminates the effects of gravity. <p>Some clinical areas require additional orientation due to the specialized nature of the patient population or the therapeutic equipment. Such examples include, but are not limited to:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burn populations • Amputee populations <p>1.4.2 Orient patients to the area in which they will be treated and provide information about relevant service policies.</p> <p>1.4.3 Understand the precautions and limitations associated with physiotherapy interventions.</p> <p>1.4.4 Observe, monitor and report the patient's performance.</p> <p>1.4.5 Respond to change in patient's status including discontinuing a specific intervention if the patient has an adverse reaction or the safety of the patient is compromised.</p> <p>1.4.6 Progress therapeutic intervention within the parameters assigned by the physiotherapist e.g. strengthening (amount of weight, alter patient position).</p>
<p>1.5 Demonstrate effective problem solving and judgment related to assigned intervention.</p>	<p>1.5.1 Apply relevant and current knowledge to the practice area.</p> <p>1.5.2 Ensure patient and personal safety in the performance of the intervention of service delivery CH 80-024 Workplace Safety Inspection and Compliance</p> <p>CH 80-020 Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) , CH 80-055 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)</p>
<p>1.6 Perform within the limits of personal competence within the practice contexts.</p>	<p>1.6.1 Recognize the limits of personal competence.</p> <p>1.6.2 Seek appropriate consultation from the physiotherapist and other team members.</p>

Role 2: Communicator

Physiotherapy assistants use effective communication to develop professional relationships with patients, families, care providers and other stakeholders.

Key Competencies	Enabling Competencies
2.1 Engage in and facilitate effective verbal and nonverbal communication with the patient, physiotherapist and interprofessional team members.	2.1.1 Communicate using various therapeutic communication strategies including active listening, reflection, reinforcement and empathy. Accurately utilize and respond to verbal and non-verbal communication. 2.1.2 Communicate using the language of physiotherapy. 2.1.3. Communicate effectively to facilitate the patient’s understanding e.g. considering education, culture, age and gender. 2.1.4 Report relevant and accurate information to the physiotherapist, patients and other team members, related to all situations.
2.2 Utilize objective and written communication skills with the patient, physiotherapist and interprofessional team.	2.2.1 Produce written documentation that is accurate and precise using appropriate terminology following all applicable provincial, regulatory and CDHA standards (CC 04-040 Clinical Documentation in the Health Record, Physiotherapy Assistant Documentation Guidelines http://chdintrac.dha.nshealth.ca/departmentservices/physiotherapy/documents/writingSOPnotes.pdf). 2.2.2 Prepare written materials to support physiotherapy service. 2.2.3 Use electronic technology.
2.3 Support diversity in communication.	2.3.1 Adapt communication strategies to reduce communication barriers with diverse populations in different practice contexts. 2.3.2 Adapt communication strategies to facilitate the patient’s understanding e.g. considering education, culture, age and gender.
2.4 Support relationships with stakeholders	2.4.1 Create and sustain positive relationships with various stakeholders including suppliers of materials and equipment.

Role 3: Collaborator

Physiotherapy assistants work collaboratively and effectively within an interprofessional team and with others to achieve optimal patient care.

Key Competencies	Enabling Competencies
3.1 Collaborate with the health care team.	3.1.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the role of the physiotherapy assistant within the health care team. 3.1.2 Demonstrate an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of team members. 3.1.3 Use a range of strategies to demonstrate mutual trust, respect and professional behavior. 3.1.4 Communicate plan(s) for assigned services to the patient and interprofessional team. 3.1.5 Gather and report information to the health care team in a timely manner.
3.2 Anticipate, identify, prevent and resolve conflict.	3.2.1 Demonstrate use of a wide range of strategies to resolve conflict. 3.2.2 Seek appropriate consultation to assist with conflict resolution. 3.2.3 Communicate effectively to prevent potential conflict.

Role 4: Practice Manager

Physiotherapy assistants manage time, prioritize competing priorities in collaboration with physiotherapists and support the delivery of effective and efficient practice.

Key Competencies	Enabling Competencies
4.1 Manage activities that support effective service delivery.	4.1.1 Prioritize workload requirements. 4.1.2 Use a systematic approach to identify and collect information to assist with assigned work activities.
4.2 Use human, financial and physical resources effectively.	4.2.1 Facilitate the use of equipment, supplies, inventory records and space to support service delivery. 4.2.2 Follow service area process for ordering supplies and equipment.
4.3 Support established organizational quality improvement activities.	4.3.1 Complete work load measurement. 4.3.2 Participate in committees and team meetings relevant to job functions. 4.3.3 Participate in performance reviews.

Role 5: Change Agent/Advocate

Physiotherapy assistants responsibly use their knowledge and influence within their role to promote the health and well-being of individual patients, communities and populations.

Key Competencies	Enabling Competencies
5.1 Promote the benefits and value of physiotherapy.	5.1.1 Demonstrate an understanding of their profession within the health system. 5.1.2 Advocate for the role of their profession.
5.2 Work collaboratively to ensure the health needs of the individual patients are met.	5.2.1 Encourage the patient to express individual needs and help the physiotherapist and team to ensure that needs are addressed. 5.2.2 Consider the impact of the determinants of health (e.g. socioeconomic factors, status, education, housing, physical environment, social support networks, gender, genetics) on the well-being of patients served. 5.2.3 Demonstrate an understanding of the patient's cultural beliefs and values.

Role 6: Scholarly Practitioner

Physiotherapy assistants incorporate critical thinking, reflection and quality improvement in their everyday practice and through lifelong learning.

Key Competencies	Enabling Competencies
6.1 Engage and enhance professional development through reflective practices and self-directed life-long learning.	6.1.1 Maintain and enhance knowledge, skills and attitudes. 6.1.2 Demonstrate required job competencies through reflective practices and self directed learning. 6.1.3 Seek input to establish a plan to address learning needs. 6.1.4 Determine resources to meet learning needs. 6.1.5 Implement a learning plan. 6.1.6 Apply knowledge to practice.
6.2 Participate in the learning process for other learners within physiotherapy services.	6.2.1 Implement components of educational programs for learners e.g. student placements, shadowing, in-service for students. 6.2.2 Serve as a resource to other learners. 6.2.3 Contribute to the process of feedback and evaluation of learners' participation. 6.2.4 Precept physiotherapy and rehabilitation therapy assistant students.
6.3 Support the evidence-informed approach used in physiotherapy services.	6.3.1 Demonstrate an understanding of evidence informed practice. 6.3.2 Identify potential sources of information. 6.3.3 Apply information into practice.

Role 7: Professional

Physiotherapy assistants are committed to the best interests of patients and society through ethical and legal practice and high personal standards of behavior.

Key Competencies	Enabling Competencies
7.1 Demonstrate ethical behavior with patients and team members in a variety of situations.	7.1.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of the regulated health professional’s standards. (Nova Scotia College of Physiotherapists Supervision and Task Assignment Practice Standard, December 2011). 7.1.2 Demonstrate trust, integrity, accountability, commitment, respect and compassion. 7.1.3 Communicate accurate job title, credentials and role. 7.1.4 Comply with CDHA standards including consent, privacy and confidentiality (CH 70-045 Consent to Treatment, CH 100-100 Privacy). 7.1.5 Demonstrate understanding of broad ethical issues within the health care system and physiotherapy service delivery. 7.1.6 Understand and manage potential conflict of interest situations.
7.2 Respect diversity and demonstrate sensitive practice.	7.2.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of diversity on function and mobility. 7.2.2 Demonstrate an understanding of the patient’s cultural beliefs and values.
7.3 Maintain personal and professional boundaries.	7.3.1 Maintain a therapeutic relationship with patients. 7.3.2 Maintain an effective working relationship with team members. 7.3.3 Understand and identify authority and its effect on professional relationships with patients and team.
7.4 Perform within the limits of personal competence within the practice context.	7.4.1 Recognize the limits of personal competence and scope of employment and take responsibility for own behaviors and actions. 7.4.2 Seek appropriate consultation from the physiotherapist and other team members.

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