

Physical Therapy Technical Standards

Introduction

The purpose of the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP) is to meet the physical therapy needs of Central and Northern Wisconsin using innovative educational methods to develop competent primary care practitioners and deliver health care solutions which benefit the community through sustainable investment of time and resources. Students must demonstrate competence in the areas of intellectual, physical, and social tasks which represent the fundamentals of physical therapy practice. The DPT program prepares students to practice physical therapy, and expects students to demonstrate competence in a diverse set of areas representative of the general scope of clinical practice. To meet this objective, the curriculum includes a broad spectrum of classes in the basic sciences and the clinical sciences, as well as clinical rotations in diverse environments representative of those found in rural and rural adjacent communities. Each student must pass all courses and clinical rotations in the curriculum to demonstrate adequate professional preparation and graduate.

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act provides comprehensive civil rights protections for qualified individuals with disabilities. An “individual with a disability” is a person who: has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a “major life activity,” or has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. A “qualified” individual with a disability is one who meets the essential eligibility requirements for the program or activity offered. The “essential eligibility requirements” will depend on the type of service or activity involved (ada.gov). Applicants are not required to disclose the nature of any disability to the Admissions Committee; however, any applicant with questions about these technical requirements is strongly encouraged to discuss the issue with the UWSP Disability Resource Center (uwsp.edu/disability-resource-center), or the Director of the DPT program before beginning the admissions process. If appropriate, and upon the request of the applicant or student, reasonable accommodations may be provided. Certain chronic or recurring illnesses and problems that interfere with patient care or safety may be incompatible with physical therapy training or practice.

The following technical standards specify attributes the program faculty believe are essential functions students must demonstrate if they are to fulfill the requirements of a general physical therapy education. These standards constitute prerequisites for entrance into, continuation in, and graduation from the UWSP DPT program. A student must possess aptitude, abilities, and skills in five areas: Observation, Communication, Sensory and Motor Coordination or Function, Intellectual-Conceptual Integrative and Quantitative Abilities and Behavioral Attributes.

Observation

Students must be able to observe demonstrations and participate in practical application of demonstrated skills in the clinical and basic sciences. A student must be able to observe a patient accurately at a distance as well as close at hand, noting verbal and non-verbal signs. Some specific examples of vision-related requirements include but are not limited to the ability to determine skin integrity, wound characteristics, and diagnostic imaging findings. In addition, students must be able to read written and illustrated material, observe demonstrations, acquire information from television and computer monitors, observe and differentiate changes in body movement, and observe anatomic structures. The ability to visually discriminate numbers, patterns, and settings on instruments associated with evaluation and intervention such as sphygmomanometers, electrocardiograms, stethoscope, goniometer, computer, and modalities.

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Communication

Students must be able to relate appropriately and effectively with clients, colleagues, and family members/caregivers. A student must be able to communicate clearly with clients to elicit information, (including aspects of the patients' perspective, i.e., their theories, concerns, and treatment preferences), accurately describe interventions and adjustments in intervention, as well as perceive verbal and non-verbal client cues. Communication includes speaking and listening, as well as reading and writing. Physical therapy education and clinical practice requires a significant volume (depth and breadth) of reading and comprehension and the ability to impart information to others. Students must be able to communicate quickly, effectively, and succinctly in oral and written English with members of the health care team including documentation in the client record. Students must be able to complete all documentation according to directions/policies in a complete and timely fashion. Other specific examples of health team communication include but are not limited to communicating rapidly and clearly with the medical team on rounds; eliciting a thorough history from patients; and interpreting and communicating complex findings in appropriate terms with various members of the health care team (fellow student, physicians, nurses, aides, therapists, social workers). Students must recognize and respond appropriately to emotional communications such as anger, sadness, worry, agitation, and confusion.

Sensory and Motor Coordination or Function

Students must have sufficient sensory and motor function to efficiently complete a physical examination utilizing palpation, assisted patient mobility, auscultation, percussion, and other diagnostic maneuvers while maintaining a safe environment for patient and provider(s). In general, this requires sufficient exteroceptive sense (touch, vibration, stereognosis, pain and temperature), proprioceptive sense (kinesthesia, position sense, pressure, movement), sensory integration and perception, physical strength, fine motor coordination, and motor function. Students must be able to maintain attention, adjust to changing environments, demonstrate flexibility, and to function safely in the ever-evolving clinical environment, where uncertainties and distractions are common. Students must be able to execute movements reasonably required to safely maneuver self or move another individual's body parts to effectively perform assessment and intervention techniques, safely and effectively guide, facilitate, inhibit and resist movement and motor patterns, provide general care, and respond to emergencies (including performance of CPR). This includes frequent standing and lifting. Students must have sufficient dexterity to handle and manipulate common evaluation and intervention equipment such as tape measures, goniometers, sphygmomanometers, debridement instruments, and computers. Students must have the stamina to perform these described functions in order to complete a typical work day (8+ hours) and a typical work week (40+ hours) while completing full-time clinical rotations.

Intellectual-Conceptual, Integrative and Quantitative Abilities

These intellectual abilities include measurement, calculation, reasoning, analysis, judgment, numerical recognition and synthesis. Problem solving is a critical skill used by physical therapists and requires all of these intellectual abilities. Students must be able to use these intellectual abilities effectively and efficiently especially in emergency situations. The ability to integrate significant findings from patient history, physical examination, and laboratory data, and then provide a reasoned differential diagnosis and proposed plan of care for intervention. In addition, recalling and retaining information in an efficient and timely manner as well as the ability to incorporate new information from peers, teachers, and the medical literature in formulating a diagnosis and treatment plans is essential. Good judgment is required for patient assessment, diagnostic and therapeutic treatment plans, and communication of their knowledge to others when appropriate. Students must be able to interpret graphs, diagrams, data and other similar information describing biologic relationships.

Behavioral Attributes

Empathy, integrity, honesty, concern for others, facilitative interpersonal skills, commitment to learning, interest and motivation are all personal qualities that are required. Such attributes are foundational to the professional behaviors that must be demonstrated throughout the program. Students must possess the emotional maturity and health required for full use of their intellectual abilities, the exercise of good judgment, the prompt completion of all responsibilities attendant to the diagnosis and care of patients, the development of mature, sensitive, and effective relationships with patients, and the ability to receive and give appropriate feedback. This requires the ability to be aware of and appropriately react to one's own immediate emotional responses.