ABPTS Guidelines on the Use of Specialty Designations

1. Only physical therapists who hold current certification by the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties (ABPTS) as clinical specialists may designate this certification by use of the initials "CS" (Certified Specialist) immediately following the initial of their specialty area. Following are the specialty initials approved by the ABPTS.

- CCS - Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Certified Specialist
- ECS - Clinical Electrophysiologic Certified Specialist
- GCS - Geriatric Certified Specialist
- NCS - Neurologic Certified Specialist
- OCS - Orthopaedic Certified Specialist
- PCS - Pediatric Certified Specialist
- SCS - Sports Certified Specialist
- WCS - Women’s Health Certified Specialist

Physical therapists who are not currently certified as clinical specialists by the ABPTS should not use any of the above designations or any designation so similar that, in context, it would be understood to infer certification by the ABPTS.

The ABPTS will take appropriate action against any individual who uses the specialty designation inappropriately. Also, an individual may not state that (s)he is "board eligible."

2. The specialty initials should always immediately follow the physical therapy designation to show the distinction of a certified specialist in an area of physical therapy. Following are some appropriate examples.

John L. Echternach, PT, EdD, ECS
Karen C. Ensley, PT, OCS
Lori A. Thein, PT, MS, SCS, ATC

Following are format examples of specialty designations for business cards or letterhead.

Susan L. Garritan, PT, MA, CCS           Edward Mulligan, PT, SCS
                                 Board Certified Specialist in Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Physical Therapy  Board Certified Clinical Specialist in Sports Physical Therapy
Susan L. Garritan, PT, MA, CCS           Edward Mulligan, PT, SCS
Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Certified Specialist  Board Certified Clinical Specialist
Diplomate, American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties  Sports Physical Therapy
Susan L. Garritan, PT, MA, CCS
Board Certified Specialist
Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Physical Therapy

3. The APTA House of Delegates policy (HOD 06-94-23-39) includes a statement regarding the use of the term "Board Certified Clinical Specialist" which reads as follows.

No physical therapist shall purport to be a "Board-Certified Clinical Specialist" unless said physical therapist has successfully completed the certification process as developed by the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties.

However, there is currently no limitation or restriction on the use of the terms "specialist" or "specializing in" an area of physical therapy. Board-certified clinical specialists in physical therapy are encouraged to refer to themselves as such whenever possible, and non-certified specialists are encouraged to use terms such as "focusing" or "emphasis" in an area of physical therapy practice.
Policy on the Use of the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties Logo

The American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties (ABPTS) insignia (logo) is the trademark of the ABPTS. The logo may only be used as designated or approved by the ABPTS. Individual certified specialists may not display the ABPTS logo on any personal or professional stationary, publications, documents, advertisements, and other materials. Certified specialists should direct questions regarding use of the ABPTS logo, name, or address to the APTA Post-Professional Certification & Credentialing Department (1-800/999-2782, ext. 8520.)

Although the ABPTS policy clearly states that individuals are not to display the ABPTS logo on their own materials, ABPTS has developed two "member designate" versions of the ABPTS logo that certified clinical specialists may use on items, such as letterhead, business cards, and other appropriate printed or electronic materials. However, in order to use the member-designate logo(s), the certified specialist must agree to abide by the terms and conditions stipulated in the license agreement which may be found on www.abpts.org, click on “For Specialists” and then click “Marketing Materials.” After the certified specialist has signed the license agreement, it is to be returned to the Post-Professional Certification & Credentialing Department at APTA. The signed agreement may be faxed (703/706-8186) or mailed to the following address:

American Physical Therapy Association  
Post-Professional Certification & Credentialing Department  
1111 N. Fairfax Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314

After the signed license agreement is received, an electronic file containing the member designate logos will be e-mailed to you. For additional information, please call the Post-Professional Certification & Credentialing Department at 800/999-2782, ext. 8520.

Position on Designation "PT," "PTA," "SPT" and "SPTA" HOD 06-99-23-29 (Program 32)  
(Initial HOD 06-78-05-04/HOD 06-85-38-66)

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) supports the use of “PT” as the regulatory designation of a physical therapist. Other letter designations such as “RPT,” “L PT” or academic and professional degrees, should not be substituted for the regulatory designation of “PT.” “PTA” is the preferred regulatory designation of a physical therapist assistant.

APTA supports the recognition of the regulatory designation of a physical therapist or a physical therapist assistant as taking precedence over other credentials or letter designations. In order to promote consistent communication of the presentation of credentials and letter designations, the Association shall recognize the following preferred order:

1. PT/PTA  
2. Highest Earned Academic Degree  
3. Specialist Certification Credentials in alphabetical order (specific to the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties)  
4. Other Credentials External to APTA  
5. Other Certification or Professional Honors (e.g., FAPTA)

APTA supports the designations “SPT” and “SPTA” for physical therapist students and physical therapist assistant students, respectively, up to the time of graduation. Following graduation and prior to licensure, graduates should be designated in accordance with state law. If state law does not stipulate a specific designation, graduates should be designated in a way that clearly identifies that they are not licensed physical therapists or physical therapist assistants.