Instructions for Documentation of Physical Therapy Experience

General Instructions:

Each physical therapy direct patient care experience entries must include: 1) each facility in which you have accumulated experience as a physical therapist to be counted toward the minimum eligibility requirement and 2) each position in which you have accumulated experience to be counted toward the minimum eligibility requirement.

Direct patient care must include activities in each of the elements of patient/client management applicable to the specialty area and included in the appropriate Description of Specialty Practice (DSP). These elements, as defined in the Guide to Physical Therapist Practice, are examination, evaluation, diagnosis, prognosis, and intervention.

Initial Certification Requirements

Applicants must submit evidence of 2,000 hours of direct patient care in the specialty area within the last ten (10) years. 25% (500) of which must have occurred within the last three (3) years. Applicants may not include experience in the specialty area that will occur after the application deadline (July 1 for Cardiovascular & Pulmonary, Clinical Electrophysiology, Oncology, and Women’s Health; July 31 for all other specialty areas). Please note, reapplicants need only submit PT experience information for the 12 months since their last application submission.

Recertification Requirements

Recertification candidates are required to document evidence of continued direct patient care activities in the specialty area, the equivalent of 200 hours per year since the date of most recent certification. Certified specialists are permitted to recertify up to 3 years prior to their certification expiration date, and direct patient care hour requirements are adjusted accordingly. Two hundred (200) of the total hours must have occurred within the last three (3) years.

Original Documentation

Applicants are not required to submit original documentation with their application to verify employment history. However, the specialty councils conduct random audits of applications. Applicants should be prepared to submit original documentation to verify their practice experience (eg, written verification from supervisors, time records, W-2 forms).

If your position includes working within more than one specialty area, you are responsible for estimating the total amount of time spent solely in the specialty area of application. Should you choose to apply for certification in a second specialty area at a later date, you will not be permitted to submit the same documentation of direct patient care hours as you submitted for this application.

What Activities Constitute Direct Patient Care?

Applicants for specialization certification in physical therapy and applicants for re-certification frequently ask questions related to the activities that they may include in calculating their “direct patient care” hours. Because each situation is different, there is no specific list of activities that may always be included or excluded as direct patient care. However, a guiding principle to consider for defining direct patient care is: the activities that a therapist participates in that have a direct influence on the care of a specific patient or client. This work can be fee based or pro bono work. Please note that eligible direct patient care hours only include the time spent practicing within your specific specialty area.
Some examples of approved direct patient care activities:

1. Team meetings where the needs of one or more specific patients are discussed and evaluated, regardless of whether or not the patient and family are present.
2. Your consultation services if your evaluation and input directly impact a specific patient.
3. Time utilized to prepare home exercise programs for specific patients.
4. Time spent reviewing medical records prior to seeing a specific patient or patients.
5. For senior therapists or heads of departments, time spent reviewing the physical therapy documentation in the records of all of the patients in his/her unit. **However, please remember that these hours can only be utilized once and cannot also be used for other categories such as administration.**
6. Time spent teaching a family how to help or care for a specific patient through a home exercise program.
7. Screening of individual participants in a community senior center for risk of falls.
8. Screening of new clients of a fitness center in order to prevent injury once they start exercising.
9. Involvement in a research project where patients are directly influenced or affected by your interaction. This interaction can be on a one-on-one basis or in a group setting, as long as the care of the patient or patients are directly influenced or affected by your interaction. **However, please remember that these hours can only be utilized once and cannot also be used to calculate research activities points.**
10. If you teach a course that involves working with a group of students to evaluate and treat a specific patient or patients, the time spent in this activity that has a direct influence on a specific person counts towards your direct patient care hours. **However, please remember that these hours could also count as clinical supervision but cannot be allocated to both categories in the Professional Development Portfolio.**
11. Time spent providing feedback on a written case from one of your students that is on a clinical affiliation, **for a patient the student is currently treating.** This feedback should be discussed with their clinical instructor and changes implemented as needed.
12. Time spent providing acute care and injury management for athletes in venues where athletes practice and compete.

**Direct Patient Care Hour Entry Instructions:**

For each facility/position entry, you are required to enter:

*Facility Name/Address*

*Year*

- Do not record employment prior to 10 years before current year.
- List positions in chronological order, beginning with your most recent position.

**Note:** It is highly recommended you begin with the current year and work backwards. That way you can stop doing entries once you meet the requirement.
**Common Disorders**

You are asked to list the five (minimum of three) most common types of disorders evaluated and treated at this facility/position for this year.

**Number of Weeks Worked for Each Direct Patient Care Experience Entry**

- Maximum number of weeks for current year may not exceed 30 for initial certification applicants or 46 for recertification candidates.
- Record the actual number of weeks worked at a facility.
- Deduct leaves of absence, extended sick leave, and vacations (if they are 1 week or longer) from the total number of weeks per year.

**Number of Hours Worked per Week for Each Direct Patient Care Experience Entry**

- A typical work week equals 40 hours. A typical work year equals 50 weeks.
- Record the actual number of hours per week if your weekly hours vary, record the average number of hours worked per week.
- Applicants who record that they work significantly more than 40 hours per week may be asked to submit additional documentation to verify these hours.

**Percentage of Clinical Practice Hours in Specialty for Each Direct Patient Care Experience Entry**

- Clinical practice includes any aspect of physical therapy practice in the specialty area. Examples include patient care, teaching, research, administration, and consultation.
- Clinical practice in the specialty area is a subset of general physical therapy practice.
- Estimate the percentage of your total hours spent in clinical practice.

**Percentage of Direct Patient Care Hours in Specialty for Each Direct Patient Care Experience Entry**

- Direct patient care must include activities in each of the elements of patient/client management applicable to the specialty area and included in the Description of Specialty Practice (DSP). These elements, as defined by the Guide to Physical Therapist Practice, are examination, evaluation, diagnosis, prognosis, and intervention.
- Direct patient care in the specialty area is a subset of clinical practice in the specialty area.
- Estimate the percentage of your clinical practice time in the specialty area that you spend in direct patient care.