



## FACT SHEET FOR PHYSICAL THERAPY

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides Physical Therapy services to Veterans and Servicemembers. Physical Therapists (PTs) are health care professionals who diagnose and treat individuals of all ages with medical problems or other health-related conditions that limit their abilities to move and perform functional activities in their daily lives.

### PHYSICAL THERAPY PRACTICE

Physical therapists diagnose and manage movement dysfunction, and enhance physical and functional abilities for movement disorders related to impairments of aging, and the musculoskeletal, cardiovascular/pulmonary, neuromuscular and integumentary (skin) systems.

Physical therapists restore, maintain, and promote optimal physical function as well as wellness, fitness, and quality of life as it relates to movement and health. Physical therapy is a safe and effective alternative to opioids for the long-term treatment of chronic pain.

Physical therapists also prevent the onset, symptoms and progression of impairments, functional limitations, and disabilities that may result from diseases, disorders, conditions or injuries.<sup>1</sup>

Physical therapists examine each individual and develop a specific treatment plan. Evidence-based services are used to decrease disability, reduce pain, improve function and independence, prevent illness, promote wellness and restore

quality of life to the Veterans and Servicemembers they serve.

### PHYSICAL THERAPY CREDENTIALS

Physical therapists are licensed health care professionals. Qualification for licensure includes passing the National Physical Therapy Exam (NPTE), administered by the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy.



*(Photo courtesy of Ann Hamilton)*

Another important qualification for licensure is graduation from physical therapy education program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) or a program that is deemed substantially equivalent to a CAPTE-

accredited program.<sup>2</sup> All Physical Therapists currently graduate with a Doctoral degree.

### POPULATION SERVED

Physical therapists practice across the continuum of care, providing services in inpatient settings (including medical centers and community living centers), home health, outpatient clinics, and tele-rehabilitation.

Physical Therapists are also key members of collaborative teams, which exist in the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R) systems of care models (ie. Polytrauma and Amputee systems of care).

Services may include:

- Pain Management
- Manual Intervention and Joint Mobilization
- Treatment of Musculoskeletal Disorders
- Strength and Conditioning/Therapeutic Exercise
- Treatment of Neurological Diseases and Stroke Recovery

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- Balance Training/Fall Prevention
- Injury Prevention
- Weight Management Program for Veterans (MOVE!)
- Wound Care
- Pain Management
- Women’s Health
- Tele-Rehabilitation
- Home Evaluations
- Adaptive mobility clinics

advanced skills, certification, and training in areas, such as: Orthopaedic, Neurological, Musculoskeletal, Cardiovascular and Pulmonary, Women’s Health, Electrophysiology, and Vestibular rehabilitation

VA’s commitment to education resulted in establishment of physical therapy residency program. This is currently the largest physical therapy residency program in the country. Locations include Ann Arbor, Boston, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Denver, Durham, Gainesville, Madison, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Mountain Home, Palo Alto, Salt Lake City, St. Louis, Tampa and Washington DC VA Medical Centers. Areas of specialty include Orthopedics, Neurological, Cardiopulmonary, and Geriatrics.

Further, the VA supports nearly 900 pre-professional Physical Therapy students out of which, the Office of Academic Affiliations is supporting nearly 200 of them are provided with

stipends during their clinical training.

**PHYSICAL THERAPY STATISTICS**

- Physical therapists are highly trained health-care professionals. Entry level education requirements include a professional Doctoral degree in Physical Therapy
- Many Physical Therapists have

- *In FY2016, Physical Therapists treated over 720,668 unique patients within VA, accounting for approximately 3.2 million total encounters.*
- *VHA is one of the single largest employers of Physical Therapists, employing more than 2,224 Physical Therapists, and an additional 503 Physical Therapy Assistants.*

\*Please contact your local VHA Physical Therapy department to inquire about services available\*

References

1. *Guide to Physical Therapist Practice*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Alexandria, VA: American Physical Therapy Association; 2003
2. *Today’ Physical Therapist: A Comprehensive Review of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Health Care Profession*. Alexandria, VA: American Physical Therapy Association: 2011

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