

# Orthopedic Physical Therapy

## Policy: Therapist Code of Ethics

All Physical Therapists will adhere to the APTA code of ethics (See attached).

Written: 01/1998  
Approved: 01/1998

Reviewed/Revised: 11/2009  
Signature:

Reviewed/Revised: 11/2015  
Signature:

Reviewed/Revised: 11/2003  
Signature:

Reviewed/Revised: 08/2010  
Signature:

Reviewed/Revised: 10/2018  
Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be initials 'SA' enclosed in a circle.

# Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapist

HOD S06-09-07-12 [Amended HOD S06-00-12-23; HOD 06-91-05-05; HOD 06-87-11-17; HOD 06-81-06-18; HOD 06-78-06-08; HOD 06-78-06-07; HOD 06-77-18-30; HOD 06-77-17-27; Initial HOD 06-73-13-24] [Standard]



## Preamble

The Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapist (Code of Ethics) delineates the ethical obligations of all physical therapists as determined by the House of Delegates of the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA). The purposes of this Code of Ethics are to:

1. Define the ethical principles that form the foundation of physical therapist practice in patient/client management, consultation, education, research, and administration.
2. Provide standards of behavior and performance that form the basis of professional accountability to the public.
3. Provide guidance for physical therapists facing ethical challenges, regardless of their professional roles and responsibilities.
4. Educate physical therapists, students, other health care professionals, regulators, and the public regarding the core values, ethical principles, and standards that guide the professional conduct of the physical therapist.
5. Establish the standards by which the American Physical Therapy Association can determine if a physical therapist has engaged in unethical conduct.

No code of ethics is exhaustive nor can it address every situation. Physical therapists are encouraged to seek additional advice or consultation in instances where the guidance of the Code of Ethics may not be definitive.

This Code of Ethics is built upon the five roles of the physical therapist (management of patients/clients, consultation, education, research, and administration), the core values of the profession, and the multiple realms of ethical action (individual, organizational, and societal). Physical therapist practice is guided by a set of seven core values: accountability, altruism, compassion/caring, excellence, integrity, professional duty, and social responsibility. Throughout the document the primary core values that support specific principles are indicated in parentheses. Unless a specific role is indicated in the principle, the duties and obligations being delineated pertain to the five roles of the physical therapist. Fundamental to the Code of Ethics is the special obligation of physical therapists to empower, educate, and enable those with impairments, activity limitations, participation restrictions, and disabilities to facilitate greater independence, health, wellness, and enhanced quality of life.

## Principles

**Principle #1:** Physical therapists shall respect the inherent dignity and rights of all individuals.  
(Core Values: Compassion, Integrity)

- 1A. Physical therapists shall act in a respectful manner toward each person regardless of age, gender, race, nationality, religion, ethnicity, social or economic status, sexual orientation, health condition, or disability.
- 1B. Physical therapists shall recognize their personal biases and shall not discriminate against others in physical therapist practice, consultation, education, research, and administration.

**Principle #2:** Physical therapists shall be trustworthy and compassionate in addressing the rights and needs of patients/clients.  
(Core Values: Altruism, Compassion, Professional Duty)

- 2A. Physical therapists shall adhere to the core values of the profession and shall act in the best interests of patients/clients over the interests of the physical therapist.
- 2B. Physical therapists shall provide physical therapy services with compassionate and caring behaviors that incorporate the individual and cultural differences of patients/clients.
- 2C. Physical therapists shall provide the information necessary to allow patients or their surrogates to make informed decisions about physical therapy care or participation in clinical research.

- 2D. Physical therapists shall collaborate with patients/clients to empower them in decisions about their health care.
- 2E. Physical therapists shall protect confidential patient/client information and may disclose confidential information to appropriate authorities only when allowed or as required by law.

**Principle #3:** Physical therapists shall be accountable for making sound professional judgments.  
(Core Values: Excellence, Integrity)

- 3A. Physical therapists shall demonstrate independent and objective professional judgment in the patient's/client's best interest in all practice settings.
- 3B. Physical therapists shall demonstrate professional judgment informed by professional standards, evidence (including current literature and established best practice), practitioner experience, and patient/client values.
- 3C. Physical therapists shall make judgments within their scope of practice and level of expertise and shall communicate with, collaborate with, or refer to peers or other health care professionals when necessary.
- 3D. Physical therapists shall not engage in conflicts of interest that interfere with professional judgment.
- 3E. Physical therapists shall provide appropriate direction of and communication with physical therapist assistants and support personnel.

**Principle #4:** Physical therapists shall demonstrate integrity in their relationships with patients/clients, families, colleagues, students, research participants, other health care providers, employers/payers, and the public.  
(Core Value: Integrity)

- 4A. Physical therapists shall provide truthful, accurate, and relevant information and shall not make misleading representations.
- 4B. Physical therapists shall not exploit persons over whom they have supervisory, evaluative or other authority (eg, patients/clients, students, supervisees, research participants, or employees).
- 4C. Physical therapists shall discourage misconduct by health care professionals and report illegal or unethical acts to the relevant authority, when appropriate.
- 4D. Physical therapists shall report suspected cases of abuse involving children or vulnerable adults to the appropriate authority, subject to law.
- 4E. Physical therapists shall not engage in any sexual relationship with any of their patients/clients, supervisees, or students.
- 4F. Physical therapists shall not harass anyone verbally, physically, emotionally, or sexually.

**Principle #5:** Physical therapists shall fulfill their legal and professional obligations.  
(Core Values: Professional Duty, Accountability)

- 5A. Physical therapists shall comply with applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations.
- 5B. Physical therapists shall have primary responsibility for supervision of physical therapist assistants and support personnel.
- 5C. Physical therapists involved in research shall abide by accepted standards governing protection of research participants.
- 5D. Physical therapists shall encourage colleagues with physical, psychological, or substance-related impairments that may adversely impact their professional responsibilities to seek assistance or counsel.
- 5E. Physical therapists who have knowledge that a colleague is unable to perform their professional responsibilities with reasonable skill and safety shall report this information to the appropriate authority.
- 5F. Physical therapists shall provide notice and information about alternatives for obtaining care in the event the physical therapist terminates the provider relationship while the patient/client continues to need physical therapy services.

**Principle #6:** Physical therapists shall enhance their expertise through the lifelong acquisition and refinement of knowledge, skills, abilities, and professional behaviors.  
(Core Value: Excellence)

- 6A. Physical therapists shall achieve and maintain professional competence.

- 6B. Physical therapists shall take responsibility for their professional development based on critical self-assessment and reflection on changes in physical therapist practice, education, health care delivery, and technology.
- 6C. Physical therapists shall evaluate the strength of evidence and applicability of content presented during professional development activities before integrating the content or techniques into practice.
- 6D. Physical therapists shall cultivate practice environments that support professional development, lifelong learning, and excellence.

**Principle #7:** Physical therapists shall promote organizational behaviors and business practices that benefit patients/clients and society.  
(Core Values: Integrity, Accountability)

- 7A. Physical therapists shall promote practice environments that support autonomous and accountable professional judgments.
- 7B. Physical therapists shall seek remuneration as is deserved and reasonable for physical therapist services.
- 7C. Physical therapists shall not accept gifts or other considerations that influence or give an appearance of influencing their professional judgment.
- 7D. Physical therapists shall fully disclose any financial interest they have in products or services that they recommend to patients/clients.
- 7E. Physical therapists shall be aware of charges and shall ensure that documentation and coding for physical therapy services accurately reflect the nature and extent of the services provided.
- 7F. Physical therapists shall refrain from employment arrangements, or other arrangements, that prevent physical therapists from fulfilling professional obligations to patients/clients.

**Principle #8:** Physical therapists shall participate in efforts to meet the health needs of people locally, nationally, or globally.  
(Core Value: Social Responsibility)

- 8A. Physical therapists shall provide pro bono physical therapy services or support organizations that meet the health needs of people who are economically disadvantaged, uninsured, and underinsured.
- 8B. Physical therapists shall advocate to reduce health disparities and health care inequities, improve access to health care services, and address the health, wellness, and preventive health care needs of people.
- 8C. Physical therapists shall be responsible stewards of health care resources and shall avoid overutilization or underutilization of physical therapy services.
- 8D. Physical therapists shall educate members of the public about the benefits of physical therapy and the unique role of the physical therapist.

# Standards of Ethical Conduct for the Physical Therapist Assistant



HOD S06-09-20-18 [Amended HOD S06-00-13-24; HOD 06-91-06-07; Initial HOD 06-82-04-08] [Standard]

## Preamble

The Standards of Ethical Conduct for the Physical Therapist Assistant (Standards of Ethical Conduct) delineate the ethical obligations of all physical therapist assistants as determined by the House of Delegates of the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA). The Standards of Ethical Conduct provide a foundation for conduct to which all physical therapist assistants shall adhere. Fundamental to the Standards of Ethical Conduct is the special obligation of physical therapist assistants to enable patients/clients to achieve greater independence, health and wellness, and enhanced quality of life.

No document that delineates ethical standards can address every situation. Physical therapist assistants are encouraged to seek additional advice or consultation in instances where the guidance of the Standards of Ethical Conduct may not be definitive.

## Standards

**Standard #1:** Physical therapist assistants shall respect the inherent dignity, and rights, of all individuals.

- 1A. Physical therapist assistants shall act in a respectful manner toward each person regardless of age, gender, race, nationality, religion, ethnicity, social or economic status, sexual orientation, health condition, or disability.
- 1B. Physical therapist assistants shall recognize their personal biases and shall not discriminate against others in the provision of physical therapy services.

**Standard #2:** Physical therapist assistants shall be trustworthy and compassionate in addressing the rights and needs of patients/clients.

- 2A. Physical therapist assistants shall act in the best interests of patients/clients over the interests of the physical therapist assistant.
- 2B. Physical therapist assistants shall provide physical therapy interventions with compassionate and caring behaviors that incorporate the individual and cultural differences of patients/clients.
- 2C. Physical therapist assistants shall provide patients/clients with information regarding the interventions they provide.
- 2D. Physical therapist assistants shall protect confidential patient/client information and, in collaboration with the physical therapist, may disclose confidential information to appropriate authorities only when allowed or as required by law.

**Standard #3:** Physical therapist assistants shall make sound decisions in collaboration with the physical therapist and within the boundaries established by laws and regulations.

- 3A. Physical therapist assistants shall make objective decisions in the patient's/client's best interest in all practice settings.
- 3B. Physical therapist assistants shall be guided by information about best practice regarding physical therapy interventions.
- 3C. Physical therapist assistants shall make decisions based upon their level of competence and consistent with patient/client values.
- 3D. Physical therapist assistants shall not engage in conflicts of interest that interfere with making sound decisions.
- 3E. Physical therapist assistants shall provide physical therapy services under the direction and supervision of a physical therapist and shall communicate with the physical therapist when patient/client status requires modifications to the established plan of care.

**Standard #4:** Physical therapist assistants shall demonstrate integrity in their relationships with patients/clients, families, colleagues, students, other health care providers, employers, payers, and the public.

- 4A. Physical therapist assistants shall provide truthful, accurate, and relevant information and shall not make misleading representations.
- 4B. Physical therapist assistants shall not exploit persons over whom they have supervisory, evaluative or other authority (eg, patients/clients, students, supervisees, research participants, or employees).
- 4C. Physical therapist assistants shall discourage misconduct by health care professionals and report illegal or unethical acts to the relevant authority, when appropriate.

- 4D. Physical therapist assistants shall report suspected cases of abuse involving children or vulnerable adults to the supervising physical therapist and the appropriate authority, subject to law.
- 4E. Physical therapist assistants shall not engage in any sexual relationship with any of their patients/clients, supervisees, or students.
- 4F. Physical therapist assistants shall not harass anyone verbally, physically, emotionally, or sexually.

**Standard #5:** Physical therapist assistants shall fulfill their legal and ethical obligations.

- 5A. Physical therapist assistants shall comply with applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations.
- 5B. Physical therapist assistants shall support the supervisory role of the physical therapist to ensure quality care and promote patient/client safety.
- 5C. Physical therapist assistants involved in research shall abide by accepted standards governing protection of research participants.
- 5D. Physical therapist assistants shall encourage colleagues with physical, psychological, or substance-related impairments that may adversely impact their professional responsibilities to seek assistance or counsel.
- 5E. Physical therapist assistants who have knowledge that a colleague is unable to perform their professional responsibilities with reasonable skill and safety shall report this information to the appropriate authority.

**Standard #6:** Physical therapist assistants shall enhance their competence through the lifelong acquisition and refinement of knowledge, skills, and abilities.

- 6A. Physical therapist assistants shall achieve and maintain clinical competence.
- 6B. Physical therapist assistants shall engage in lifelong learning consistent with changes in their roles and responsibilities and advances in the practice of physical therapy.
- 6C. Physical therapist assistants shall support practice environments that support career development and lifelong learning.

**Standard #7:** Physical therapist assistants shall support organizational behaviors and business practices that benefit patients/clients and society.

- 7A. Physical therapist assistants shall promote work environments that support ethical and accountable decision-making.
- 7B. Physical therapist assistants shall not accept gifts or other considerations that influence or give an appearance of influencing their decisions.
- 7C. Physical therapist assistants shall fully disclose any financial interest they have in products or services that they recommend to patients/clients.
- 7D. Physical therapist assistants shall ensure that documentation for their interventions accurately reflects the nature and extent of the services provided.
- 7E. Physical therapist assistants shall refrain from employment arrangements, or other arrangements, that prevent physical therapist assistants from fulfilling ethical obligations to patients/clients.

**Standard #8:** Physical therapist assistants shall participate in efforts to meet the health needs of people locally, nationally, or globally.

- 8A. Physical therapist assistants shall support organizations that meet the health needs of people who are economically disadvantaged, uninsured, and underinsured.
- 8B. Physical therapist assistants shall advocate for people with impairments, activity limitations, participation restrictions, and disabilities in order to promote their participation in community and society.
- 8C. Physical therapist assistants shall be responsible stewards of health care resources by collaborating with physical therapists in order to avoid overutilization or underutilization of physical therapy services.
- 8D. Physical therapist assistants shall educate members of the public about the benefits of physical therapy.