

Essential Functions of a Physical Therapist Assistant Student

Students of Whatcom Community College's Physical Therapist Assistant Program must be able to meet these minimum standards, with or without reasonable accommodation, for successful completion of the program requirements (separate from academic standards for admission).

They must be capable of meeting these skills in a safe, reliable and efficient manner, in order to fully participate in all aspects of the training and educational program.

Each applicant must be able to perform, with or without reasonable accommodations, each of these essential functions in order to fully participate in the PTA Program and successfully complete the requirements of the AS degree in PTA.

Prior to Admission: It is important for applicants to review this list to become familiar with the expectations of a PTA student herein after referred to as "**Essential Functions.**"

Following admission: In the professional phase of the program, each PTA student will be required to submit a signed copy of the form, **Essential Functions for PTA Student.** Completed forms will be maintained in the individual student's file located in the Health Professions Program Coordinator office (HPEC 104).

If, after admission into the PTA program, any student experiences a change in his or her ability to fulfill the Essential Functions requirements, the student is required to inform the PTA Program Coordinator in writing.

Individuals applying to the Physical Therapist Assistant Program should consider the following skills, which have been identified as essential for all PTAs to be able to perform:

Mobility and Psychomotor	Behavioral and Psychosocial
Sensory	Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
Communication	

- 1. Mobility and Psychomotor Skills:** The applicant must be able to have sufficient motor capabilities to perform the movements and skills required for providing safe, reliable and effective physical therapy interventions for patients across the lifespan. These include but are not limited to:
 - Ability to move or position patients and equipment which involves bending or stooping freely to floor level and reaching above the head and exerting 25-50 pounds of force when lifting, carrying, pushing or pulling.
 - Appropriate body mechanics for all skills related to physical therapy and react safely and appropriately to sudden and unexpected movements of patients/classmates.

- Ability to endure and successfully complete a 40-45 hour workweek during clinical education courses, which includes standing, walking and stair climbing.
 - Ability to provide for the patient's safety in all physical therapy activities.
 - Manipulate and operate physical therapy equipment and demonstrate the ability and dexterity to manipulate the devices used in physical therapy, which involves adjusting gauges, dials, goniometers, equipment settings, tape measures, printouts, etc.
 - Ability to administer/perform CPR and emergency first aid safely and reliably without assistance.
 - Ability to observe and practice standard precautions.
 - Ability to work in an environment that requires significant physical activity and mobility throughout the workday in a way that does not compromise patient, classmate or therapist safety.
2. **Sensory Skills:** The applicant must have the ability to observe and participate in demonstrations and in physical therapy treatment interventions applied to patients. This includes the ability to obtain information in classroom, laboratory or clinical settings through observation, palpation, auscultation and other measures including but not limited to:
- Visual ability (corrected as necessary) to recognize and interpret facial expressions and body language, identify normal and abnormal patterns of movement, to read or set parameters on physical therapy equipment and discriminate color changes.
 - Auditory ability (corrected as necessary) to recognize and respond to soft voices, auditory tones, call bells, equipment alarms and to effectively use devices for measurements of blood pressure and breath sounds.
 - Ability to palpate a pulse and to detect changes or abnormalities of surface skin texture, skin temperature, body segment contour muscle tone and joint movement.
3. **Communication Skills:** The applicant must be able to utilize effective and efficient communication with peers, faculty, various clinical medical practitioners, patients and their families. This includes but is not limited to the following:
- Ability to communicate effectively using Standard English (interpret and express) both verbally and in writing.
 - Ability to correctly follow and interpret verbal instructions. Correct spelling required.
 - Ability to effectively and efficiently communicate verbally and in documentation (on computer or paper) with patients, families, health care professionals, community and with reimbursement payers.

- Ability to recognize, interpret and respond appropriately to nonverbal communications from patients, self and others. Modify communication to meet the needs of different audiences.
- Ability to work effectively as part of an interdisciplinary team.
- Ability to effectively use a computer and operate other software programs for billing, documentation or scheduling.
- Ability to apply and communicate principles of logical or scientific thinking to define problems, establish facts and draw valid conclusions.
- Ability to engage in respectful, non-judgmental interactions with individuals from various lifestyles, cultures, beliefs, races, socioeconomic classes and abilities.
- Ability to establish trustworthy professional, empathetic relationships with individuals from a variety of backgrounds, ages and needs.
- Ability to graciously admit mistakes and accept constructive feedback.

4. **Behavioral and Psychosocial Skills:** The applicant must demonstrate good judgment, and the ability to develop empathetic and therapeutic relationships with patients and others. The applicant must have a tolerance of close and direct physical contact with a diverse population. This includes individuals of all ages, races, socioeconomic, ethnic backgrounds gender, sexual orientation and a variety of people with weight disorders, physical disfigurements and medical or mental health problems. This includes but is not limited to:

- Ability to uphold the APTA Standards of Ethical Conduct for the PTA and to maintain patient confidentiality.
- Ability to recognize and respond appropriately to potentially dangerous situations.
- Ability to work with laboratory partners, patients, families, and others during stressful conditions including but not limited to medically or emotionally unstable individual, and providing CPR or other emergency interventions.
- Ability to encourage cooperation and collegial relationships with classmates, instructors, other health care providers, patients and families.
- Ability to maintain professional demeanor in all clinical interactions.
- Ability to motivate and positively influence patients and others.
- Ability to work effectively with challenging and terminally ill patients.
- Ability to appropriately receive direction and collaborate with supervisors, academic and clinical instructors, physicians and other designated health professional.

5. **Critical Thinking/Problem Solving Skills:** The applicant must be able to critically think and problem-solve, calculate, reason and be able to comprehend and process information within the timeframe of a session of physical therapy interventions. The applicant must be able to organize, prioritize and attend to tasks and responsibilities efficiently and effectively. This includes but is not limited to:
- Ability to collect, interpret and analyze written, verbal and observed data about patients.
 - Ability to prioritize multiple tasks, integrate information and make appropriate decisions.
 - Ability to communicate the rationale or reasoning to justify decisions and to consult with others to clarify information.
 - Ability to apply knowledge of principles, indications and contraindications for PT interventions.
 - Ability to educate PTA students, aides, volunteers, patients, families and caregivers.
 - Participate in the process of scientific inquiry.
 - Procure evidence-based information and apply it to the practice of PT.
 - Comprehend, synthesize, integrate and apply information from written materials, demonstrations, lectures, class discussions, laboratory practice sessions and real and simulated patients.

Applicants to the PTA Program who have questions or concerns about these requirements are encouraged to contact the Interim PTA Program Coordinator, Brenda Hensch, MPT at bhensch@whatcom.edu.