



PHYSICAL THERAPIST ASSISTANT (PTA)

Physical Therapist Assistants (PTA's) perform components of physical therapy procedures and related tasks selected by a supervising physical therapist (PT). These workers assist physical therapists in providing services that help improve mobility, relieve pain, and prevent or limit permanent physical disabilities of patients suffering from injuries or disease. Patients include accident victims and individuals with disabling conditions such as low-back pain, arthritis, heart disease, fractures, head injuries, and cerebral palsy.

IMPORTANT QUALITIES

- **Compassion.** Physical therapy is an important part of the recovery process for people who have been through surgeries, illnesses, and injuries. Physical therapist assistants should **enjoy** helping people.
- **Detail oriented.** Like other healthcare professionals, physical therapist assistants should be organized and have a keen eye for detail. They must keep accurate records and follow written instructions carefully to ensure quality care.
- **Dexterity.** Physical therapist assistants should be comfortable using their hands to provide manual therapy and therapeutic exercises. They should also be comfortable working with their hands to set up equipment and prepare treatment areas.
- **Interpersonal skills.** Physical therapist assistants spend much of their time interacting with clients. They should be courteous and friendly.
- **Physical stamina.** Physical therapist assistants are frequently on their feet and moving as they work with their patients. They must often kneel, stoop, bend and stand for long periods. They should enjoy physical activity.

EDUCATION/LICENSURE

Physical therapist assistants typically earn an **associate degree** from an accredited program. In 2014, there were 309 associate's degree programs for physical therapist assistants accredited by the *Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education*. www.captonline.org/Programs/

Programs are divided into academic coursework and clinical experience. Academic courses include algebra, English, anatomy and physiology, and psychology. Clinical work includes certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and other first aid and hands-on experience in treatment centers. Many physical therapist assistants continue their formal education to qualify for jobs in administration, management, and education.

All states except Hawaii require physical therapist assistants to be licensed. Licensure typically requires graduation from an accredited physical therapist assistant program and passing the National Physical Therapy Exam. Some states require additional state-administered exams. In some states, physical therapist assistants also need to take continuing education courses.

Related Schools in Virginia

- Germanna Community College
- Jefferson College of Health Sciences
- Tidewater Community College
- Northern Virginia Community College
- Wytheville Community College
- Riverside School of Health Careers – Newport News, VA

AVERAGE SALARY RANGE

The lowest 10% earned less than \$31,070, and the top 10% earned more than \$68,820. In May 2012, the median annual wage for physical therapist assistants was \$52,160. The median annual wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10% earned less than \$31,070, and the top 10% earned more than \$68,820.

WORKING CONDITIONS

The hours and days that physical therapist assistants work vary with the facility and with whether they are full- or part-time employees. Many outpatient physical therapy offices and clinics have evening and weekend hours, to help coincide with patients' personal schedules. About 25 percent of all physical therapist assistants work part time.

JOB OUTLOOK

Employment of physical therapist assistants is expected to **increase 41 percent** from 2010 to 2020, much faster than the average for all occupations.

Demand for physical therapy services is expected to increase in response to the health needs of an aging population, particularly the large baby-boom generation. This group is staying more active later in life than previous generations. However, baby boomers also are entering the prime age for heart attacks and strokes, increasing the demand for cardiac and physical rehabilitation. Older people are particularly vulnerable to chronic and debilitating conditions that require therapeutic services. These patients often need additional help in their treatment, making the roles of assistants vital.

Medical and technological developments should permit an increased percentage of trauma victims and newborns with birth defects to survive, creating added demand for therapy and rehabilitative services.

Physical therapists are expected to increasingly use assistants to reduce the cost of physical therapy services. Once the physical therapist has evaluated a patient and designed a treatment plan, the physical therapist assistant can provide many parts of the treatment, as directed by the therapist. In addition, changes to restrictions on reimbursements for physical therapy services by third-party payers will increase patient access to services and increase demand.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

American Physical Therapy Association

1111 N. Fairfax St.
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 684-2782
(800) 999-2782
<http://www.apta.org>

Virginia Physical Therapy Association

1111 N. Fairfax St.
Alexandria, VA 22314
(800) 999-2782 ext. 3235, ext. 3235
<http://www.vpta.org>

Related Websites: <http://www.bls.gov> <http://www.vaview.vt.edu> <http://www.ahec.vcu.edu>