



Reentry of Physical Therapy Providers: A Resource for Regulatory Boards

The flexibility to move in and out of the workforce is attractive for many healthcare professionals. For many different reasons, physical therapists and physical therapist assistants (PT providers) may voluntarily choose to take an extended absence from active practice lasting weeks, months, or even years. The provider may or may not have maintained active licensure during the absence from practice. However at some point, some of these same PT providers choose to return to, or reenter, the workforce.

The definition of reentry is a return to practice or work for which one has been licensed or certified following an extended period of absence not resulting from discipline; the absence has **no relationship to a disciplinary action or the board's knowledge of substance abuse issues**. Most healthcare professions deal with the concept of reentry as licensees start families, deal with illnesses, pursue other interests, enter and then exit, retirement.

Physicians, nurses, and occupational therapists have all addressed the issue of reentry in some way. While physicians have developed many recommendations from their professional associations, the guidance for nurses tends to come from the statutes and regulations. Many state nursing practice acts and regulations provide the guidelines needed for nurses to reenter the profession. The American Occupational Therapy Association has also developed guidelines for return to the field after a prolonged absence.

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) Learning Center provides resources within the Learning Center to support PT providers reentering the workforce and the employers. Content areas covered include documentation, payment models, direct access, and integrity in practice. The APTA and the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (FSBPT) both offer self-assessments to help PT providers objectively identify areas of strength and weakness.

All physical therapy boards have the responsibility to determine if an individual demonstrates the skills and knowledge for safe and competent return to practice, however, there is little agreement on just how to accomplish that goal. There is widespread variability in the requirements to reenter the workforce as a PT provider, and individuals must navigate the requirements of the regulatory boards. Often, jurisdictions use a tiered approach to reentry requirements based on the length of the absence from actively practicing or working. However, no evidence was found in the literature to identify or support an appropriate time frame as related to

the loss of professional skills and knowledge. The most common requirements included a prescribed amount of continuing education hours, remediation by coursework, limitations on practice or work including supervised clinical practice, and payment of fees. Boards are often granted flexibility and discretion when evaluating the case of a reentering PT provider.

Determining when to require reentry requirements, or what those requirements should be, or how to have those requirements met are all questions that Boards need to consider. Research opportunities exist to determine the actual incidence of physical therapy providers reentering the workforce and the demand for structured programs to facilitate the return.

Professional and regulatory associations have recognized the need for reentry programs and tools to assist with those seeking to return to their profession after an absence.

PT providers may find reentry difficult due to the lack of organized educational programs and objective learning tools, assessments and clinical opportunities that can assist an individual with a return to safe and competent practice.

Currently, there are no formalized programs, learning plans, professional portfolios, mentoring or structured supervised clinical skills evaluations to assist with a more direct and comprehensive approach to reentry in physical therapy. With no objective programs or assessment tools, significant variation exists amongst the jurisdictions in requirements for reentry.

[View the FSPBT Resource Paper on Reentry for Regulatory Boards.](#)