



*This article is based on a presentation by Seif A. Mahmoud, Managing Director of Information Systems, Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy, at the 2017 FSBPT Annual Meeting.*

## **The Exam, Licensure, and Disciplinary Database... where are we now?**

The Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy's (FSBPT) Exam, Licensure, and Disciplinary Database (ELDD) has come a long way since its inception and continues to improve as member jurisdictions improve their participation levels.

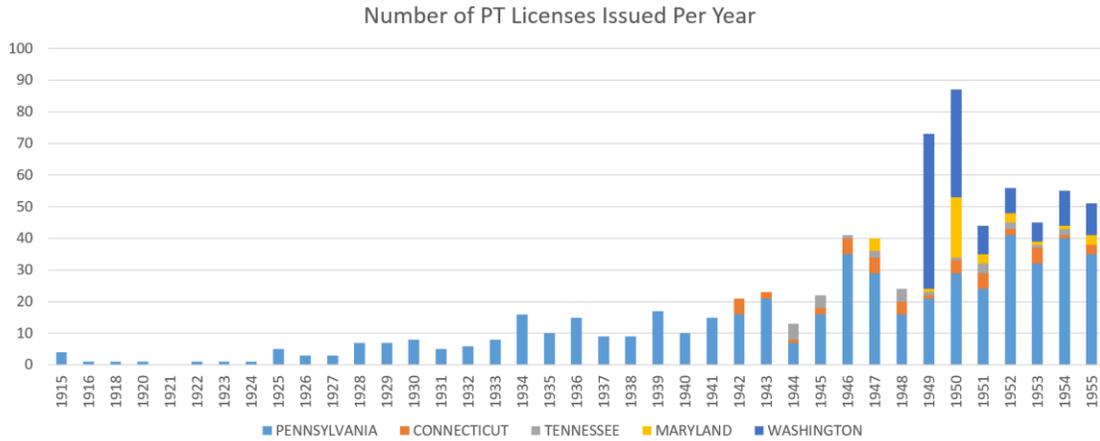
Nineteen of FSBPT's fifty-three member jurisdictions had reached 5-Star status at the end of the third quarter of 2017, meaning they frequently update their data in a timely manner in the three areas of discipline, licenses, and exam scores, including historical data. An additional twelve member jurisdictions are 4-Star, leaving 22 jurisdictions at 3-Star or less.

The ELDD was created in support of the Federation and its members' collective mission of public protection. The database attempts to connect the exams with licenses and disciplinary actions. It attempts to match score transfers and jurisprudence exams, and it ties all the information back to a person so it can provide a comprehensive profile of each licensee.

For the first time in the history of the ELDD, over 50% of jurisdictions are participating at a 4-Star or 5-Star level. FSBPT has thus begun to analyze the data in an attempt to tell the story of the evolution of the physical therapy profession. As FSBPT incorporates additional historical data from the remaining jurisdictions and cross-references the data to other information sources, the story may evolve.

## The Early Years

The earliest license records in the ELDD are from 1915.

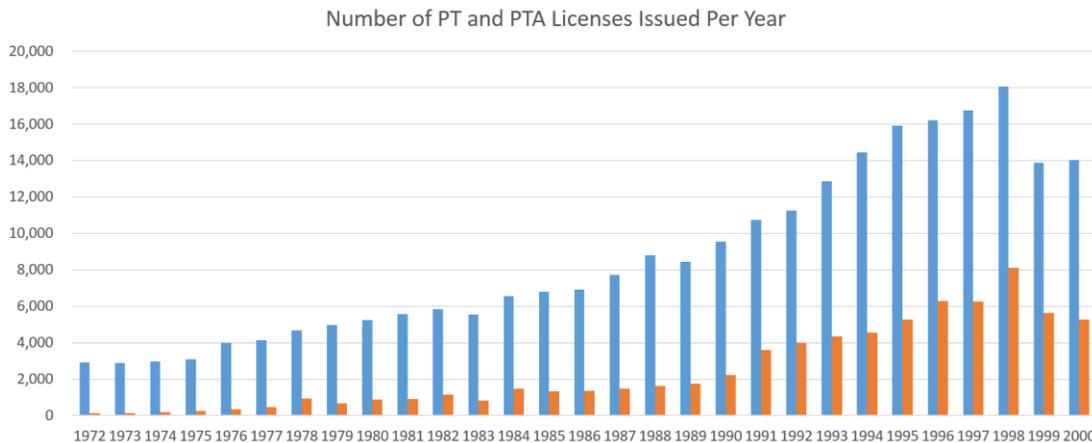


Pennsylvania is the first state that appears to have issued a consistent set of licenses beginning in 1915. It wasn't until 1942 that Connecticut became the second jurisdiction to issue licenses. Tennessee joined the group in 1944, followed by Maryland in 1947. Rounding off the top five was Washington State in 1949.

The American Registry of Physical Therapists tracked licensees from 1936 through Dec. 31, 1971. Its objective was to examine and register qualified physical therapists. It eventually dissolved because state licensing boards had taken on the role of administering exams and maintaining a list of those licensed to practice physical therapy.

## The Growth Years

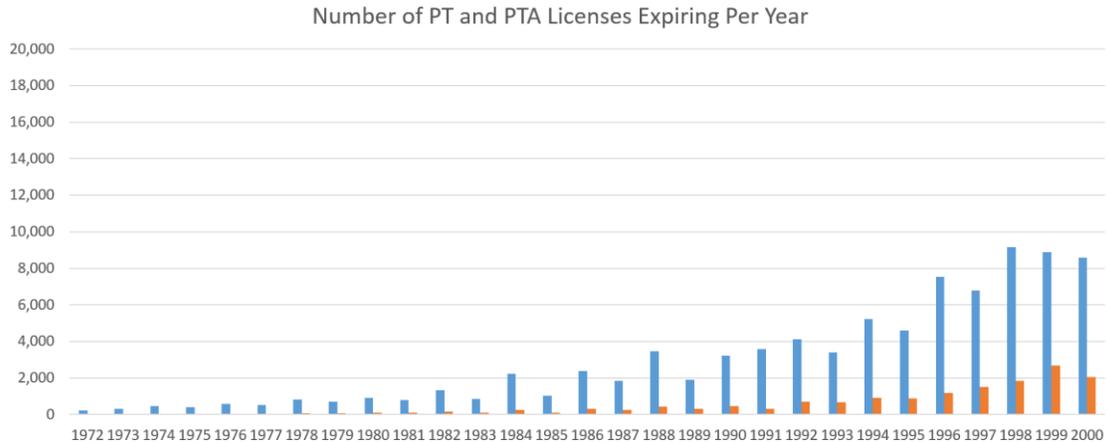
The profession appeared to go thru a significant growth period between the early 1970's thru the late 1990's.



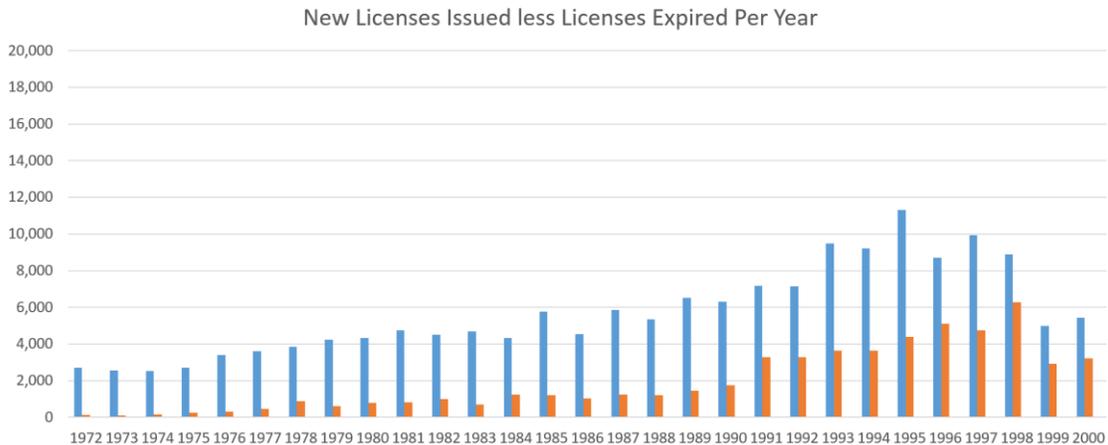
Between 1972, when about 3,000 licenses were issued each year, to 1998, when approximately

18,000 licenses were issued, just about every year saw a significant uptick in the number of licenses issued. After hitting the peak in 1998, the number of licenses issued in 1999 and 2000 fell back to about 14,000. With PTAs, there is a similar progression.

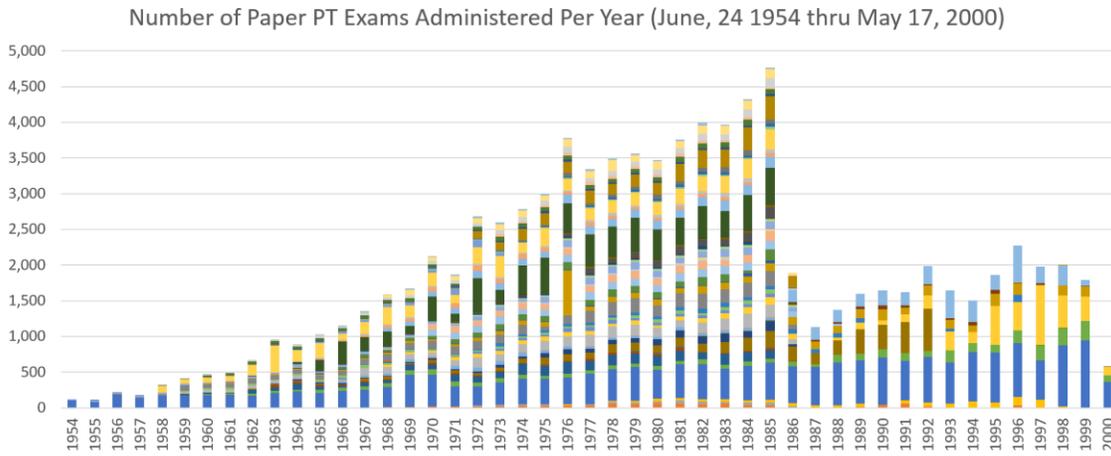
Licenses that expired in that same time period followed a similar trend.



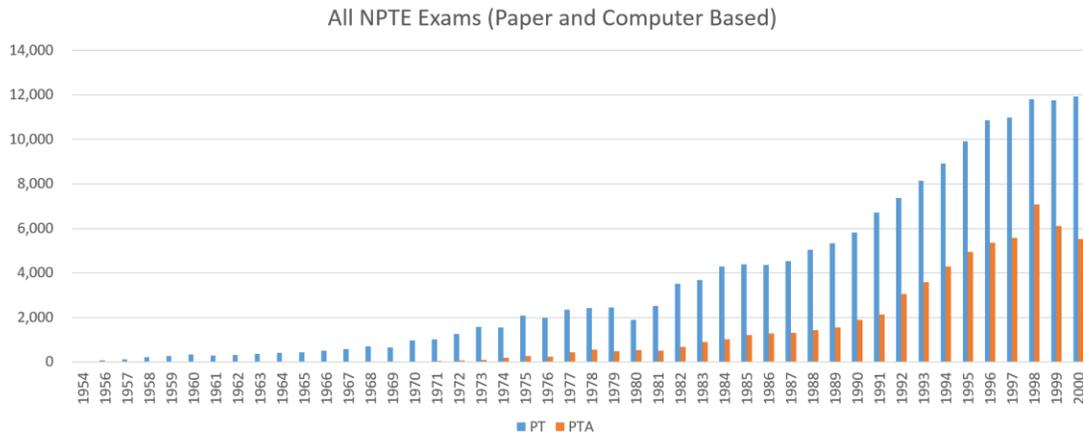
By looking at the number of additional licenses and subtracting the expired licenses, the true growth is revealed in the number of PTs practicing. It's interesting to see that the peak in net new additions of physical therapists occurred in '95, not in '98 as was the case in PTA's.



According to the history in the database, National Physical Therapy Exams were first administered in 1954, and by 1971, all 53 jurisdictions had begun to administer and score the NPTE.



Paper and pencil exams were used exclusively until 1985, when computerized testing became available. This was an interesting transition in the history of the profession because, intentionally or not, the number of exams people were able to take by leveraging technology grew significantly.



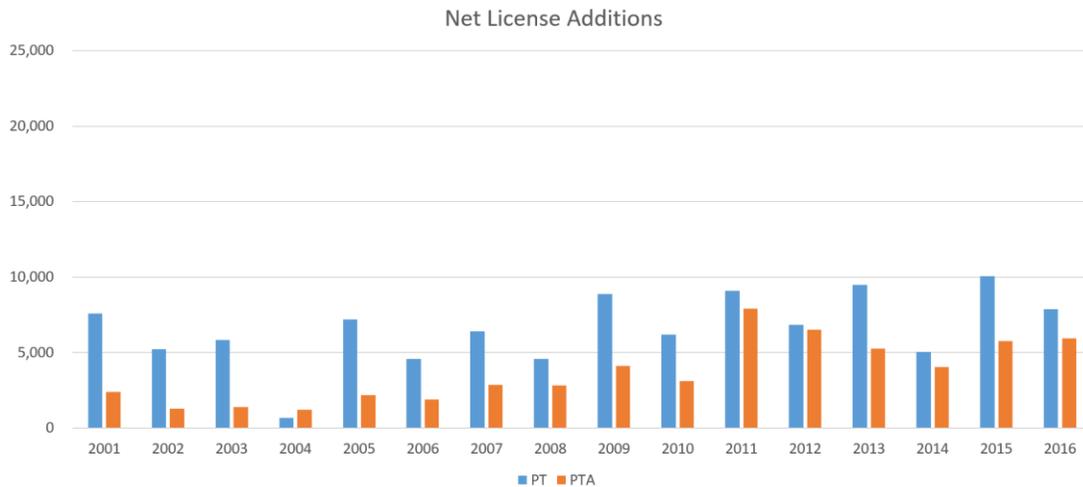
### The Recent Past

Around the turn of the century, growth rates in the profession appear to stabilize. FSBPT launched its Score Transfer Service during this period and began the data collection and dissemination efforts that are the heart of the Exam, Licensure and Disciplinary Database.

Not only is FSBPT able to measure licenses issued and expired per year, but it can now measure with more precision the number of graduates each year of PT and PTA educational programs along with the number of people passing the NPTE each year. These new metrics provide better insight into the supply of PTs and PTAs in various parts of the country.

A lot more licensees have gone through the score transfer process since 2011. That shows a lot of people moving between the states, or potentially attempting to seek additional licenses. The actual number of licenses issued per year is approaching 20,000 for PTs and 10,000 for PTAs.

Approximately 5,000 to 10,000 PT licenses expire each year, with around 2,000 to 5,000 for the PTAs. Net license additions, with the exception of 2004, hover between 5,000 and 10,000 each year.



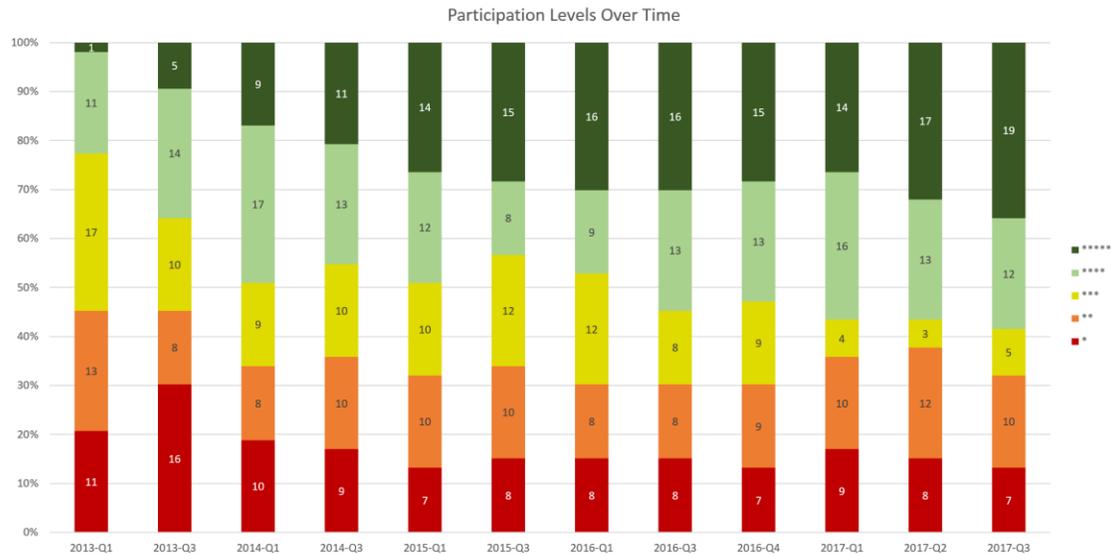
Disciplinary actions hover around 350, with the notable exception of 2008 when the needle spikes at more than 450. For PTAs, it's between 100 and 150 each year.

Disciplinary Notifications is the primary way the database is used to protect the public. This is when one jurisdiction is notified that one of their licensees was disciplined by another jurisdiction. Disciplinary Notifications consistently hover in the neighborhood of 500 per year.

In 2016, an FSBPT team focused on searching out nearly 1,000 unreported disciplinary actions and entering them into the ELDD so all jurisdictions would be notified. 2017 will likely end with about 600 disciplinary actions.

### **FSBPT Needs Partnerships with Member Jurisdictions**

Since the creation of the Participation Levels Rating System in 2013, there has been significant improvement in the number of jurisdictions who participate in the ELDD.



Generally speaking, concerns about participating in the ELDD have fallen into one of three categories.

1. They do not have the staff to be able to maintain their own system and the ELDD on an ongoing basis.
2. The jurisdiction faces a legal boundary that prevents it from sharing information.
3. They have a technological barrier that prevents them from having this information in a shareable format.

Since ratings are measured each quarter, a jurisdiction's rating can decline from quarter to quarter. For example, if a disciplinary action is taken by a jurisdiction but is not reported to the ELDD within a reasonable period of time, that state's rating will drop.

North Carolina was the first state to reach a 5-Star rating and the rating level has since grown to include 19 jurisdictions. More than half now are 4-Star or better. FSBPT is working with those last 17 states to try to get through the roadblocks that are preventing them from achieving a 5-star rating.

### Achieving a 5-Star Rating

The three areas covered in the rating system are discipline, licenses, and exam scores. From a discipline perspective, the 5-Star jurisdictions are very quick to notify the ELDD of actions taken (using the FSBPT's Online Processing System), which allows FSBPT to notify other jurisdictions about the action. In addition to entering the disciplinary action, 5-Star States classify the action and enter the reasons behind the action. One of the goals of entering this type of information about discipline into the database is to identify trends that could lead to more education and possibly reduce the number of disciplinary actions over time.

As they are issued, new licenses are also entered using the Online Processing System. The license number is typed in based on the score transfer or based on the new score report.

Five-Star states also provide frequent updates of their licensure data. If somebody changes their name, address, or other demographic information about themselves, that information is communicated to the ELDD quickly. Updates should be done weekly, although there remains an option to perform monthly updates. Top-tier states work with FSBPT to correct any potentially “bad” data that exists in their database. For example, if Texas sends information about a licensee and Louisiana sends information about the same licensee, and the Texas database show a Jan. 5 date of birth and the Louisiana database shows a May 1 birth date, FSBPT notifies each of the jurisdictions. Hopefully, each jurisdiction can then look back in their records to identify the data entry error that might have occurred and correct it.

From an exam score perspective, all the earlier paper and pencil exams are in the database, but they're only identified by an exam ID number. Jurisdictions have the key to matching the numbers to real people. FSBPT wants to work with each jurisdiction that hasn't already dug through their files, microfiche, or boxes of paper, to identify the name of the person that belongs to that number and match them to that score.

FSBPT will work with jurisdictions to improve their star ratings and improve the ELDD to increase the value the tool provides to public protection. Staffing and technological issues are relatively easy to overcome. FSBPT will also work with states to overcome any legal barriers. Please reach out to FSBPT staff if you would like assistance in improving your rating.



**Seif A. Mahmoud** is the Managing Director of Information Systems, Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy. He is responsible for overseeing the Information Management and Technology assets of the FSBPT, the FCCPT, and INPTRA. His education includes a Bachelors of Science in Information Systems from the University of Texas at Arlington. Prior to joining the FSBPT staff in 2002, Seif provided consulting services in the fields of electronic commerce, web-based corporate operations, and business partner integration.

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