



### **When is a School a School?**

In the credentialing of foreign applicants and verification of schools, it has long been evident that there are such things as diploma mills. These are generally easy to identify as they have no recognition or accreditation, and there is no actual “brick and mortar” building.

In recent months the credentialing agencies for foreign physical therapy graduates have been grappling with a new twist to this concept. These are the Private Career Colleges (PCC) found in Ontario and some distance education learning programs in India. This article will hopefully identify the concerns and how the credentialing agencies work to identify the status of the schools.

In this article, we will also discuss transitional master’s (t-MPT) or transitional DPT (t-DPT) programs versus entry-level PT programs and their implication for initial licensure.

#### **Private Career Colleges (PCC)**

These are found in Ontario and are regulated by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Regulated and training being the key words here.

The PCCs are non-degree granting institutions that offer training programs for employment positions. They are primarily PTA training programs; however, some of the PCCs offer online courses to supplement PT education as well. As non-degree granting institutions, they are not considered to be post-secondary education and thus courses are not included in a credentials review for credit.

In Canada, PTAs are not regulated, so the scope of the job description is up to the employer. The website for the ministry warns students to do their homework regarding the usefulness of a certificate from a PCC. There are also PTA programs that exist within accredited degree-granting colleges and universities in Canada.

In researching the status of the PCC, the following response came from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities:

"... [W]e are the Regulatory Body for Private Career Colleges and we approve those programs that fall under the following criteria:

- Physical presence in the province of Ontario
- Vocational program
- 40 hour or longer in duration

Or

- \$1,000.00 or more in tuition cost

We do not recognize or accredit programs..."

Registration with the Ministry is more like a business license, not recognition of post-secondary educational status. The programs must be located entirely within the borders of Ontario to have any recognition. Thus when some of the PCCs were offering courses at US satellite campuses, this work was definitely not recognized under Ontario regulations, and their location took these programs outside of the laws of Ontario.

The five credentialing agencies that are recognized by FSBPT to use the [Coursework Tool \(CWT\)](#) participated in a webinar on this topic last fall. All agreed that the information from the Ministry precluded acceptance of any of the coursework completed at these training programs toward a review for equivalency.

Physiotherapy programs in Canada are now accredited by the Accreditation Council for Canadian Physiotherapy Academic Programs (ACCPAC). The ACCPAC is currently in the process of developing accreditation standards for PTA programs. As of this writing none of the PCCs were participating in these standard-setting processes, nor are they likely to meet the minimum standards being set by the ACCPAC.

### **Distance Education Programs**

In India, universities are recognized or accredited by the University Grants Commission (UGC). Each university has a number of colleges affiliated with that university. In recent months, credentialing agencies have been seeing curriculum documents being release by the Distance Education Council and not by the University Registrar as we see for the other affiliated colleges.

When asked for additional information on the programs there seems to be a number of unanswered questions regarding the recognition of these schools of PT. The UGC has come out with a clear statement that as of 2010, they will not recognize any distance learning PT programs. Prior to this time the information is that the Distance Education Council (DEC) had oversight for these programs, but the DEC does not have any accreditation authority.

Applicants who completed these programs currently remain in limbo while the FCCPT and the other credentialing agencies continue to explore clarification of the status of these programs. As of this writing, the UGC has not indicated that they had approved or accredited any of the DEC schools. And the DEC admits they did not have any authority to give recognition. Credentialing agencies that use the CWT will

continue to pursue the status of those schools from 2004 to 2010, but until this can be clarified, they cannot accept coursework taken in these programs.

### **Transitional Masters or Transitional DPT Programs**

In the US, CAPTE accredits only entry-level programs. They do not accredit post-professional degrees, such as the Transitional Master's (T-MPT) or the Transitional DPT (T-DPT). There have been concerns that applicants for initial licensure are entering these post-professional degrees as their entry-level PT degree. Jurisdictions may not be sure how to determine when to ask for more information from the applicant in these cases.

Jurisdictions should carefully review applications of candidates who submit transcripts or documents that show graduation with an advanced degree rather than an entry-level degree. Some schools will indicate on the transcript "not entry level" or call the degree the "T-DPT." Unfortunately, this is not a universal practice.

What are some of the signs to look for to decide if a transcript is for an entry-level or post-professional degree?

- Length of study – Since all PT programs are now post-baccalaureate degrees, the candidate should be providing their first degree transcript and then the PT transcript for the professional degree. If the transcript is only two to three years of full-time study, there needs to be another undergraduate degree identified somewhere in the candidate's history.
- If the full curriculum was followed in a single US program, the length should be a minimum of five years. Somewhere on the transcript there should be the BS degree and then the final degree.
- At the start of the transcript, the entry requirements are usually listed, and this may give the previous degree as well. Thus if the entry-level degree in PT was completed in another country, this may be listed before the admission for the first semester of study.
- When the degree is conferred, look for information such as "not the entry degree," or a designation such as "t-DPT" or a degree title such as "MS-health science," "D.Sci" or "PhD." These would be warnings that these are not the entry-level degree.
- Look at the transcript entries themselves. If the first year does not include anatomy, physiology, kinesiology or some of the other basic health sciences, then you might wish to question if this is entry level.

So what can you do when you have a question?

- Contact the faculty program director. They can usually tell you if this was a graduate from their entry-level or post-professional curriculum, and they are happy to provide this information as it will affect their pass rates.
- Go to [www.apta.org](http://www.apta.org) and search for accredited PT and PTA programs. You can locate the program by state. The designation for the entry-level degree is listed as well as the contact information for the program director or chair.
- Log into the school website and pull up the entry-level curriculum. In most cases, schools post courses by semester so you can verify what should be in the transcript.

- Contact a credentialing agency and ask for assistance to research the entry-level courses.