

Guidelines for Continuing Professional Development ***Public Protection through Licensee Well-Being & Healthy Practice***

Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants are licensed for the purpose of protecting the public's health, safety, and welfare. Although licensees are legally and ethically responsible for updating their skills to contemporary practice, regulators have the ultimate responsibility to assure the public that those persons who are licensed are worthy of those licenses.

Regulators need to implement strategies to ensure licensed physical therapists and physical therapist assistants are safe, effective, and ethical practitioners not only at the point of entry to the profession, but throughout their careers.

In the current paradigm, regulators primarily focus on making sure that licensees meet minimum legal standards. Historically, the completion of continuing education has been a proxy for ensuring the "continuing competence" of licensees. The problem is that research suggests continuing education alone does not ensure competence and prevent harm to clients.

The term, "continuing competence," is often used to describe a cyclical process for meeting jurisdictional-prescribed requirements. In the continually changing health care environment, simply meeting these requirements is not sufficient.

Purpose Statement

These guidelines are intended to

- Promote public protection through licensee well-being and healthy practice,
- Encourage licensees to engage in continuing professional development even when it is not required by their jurisdiction,
- Provide academic institutions with a framework for physical therapist and physical therapist assistant education, and
- Encourage employers and health care organizations to create environments that supports licensee well-being and healthy practice, thereby promoting public protection and improving well-being and retention.

This new approach shifts away from punitive and retrospective action toward risk-based regulation: the preventative and proactive identification of risks and supports and resulting remedies.

This new approach is based on current, best evidence. We recognize the need to continue to conduct professional competence research, collect data, and modify the guidelines as evidence for best practices evolves.

Licensee Well-being and Healthy Practice

Healthy practice is a set of conditions that encourages safe, effective, and ethical practice. "Healthy practice" is the optimal combination of personal and professional well-being, along with the health and effectiveness of the practice environment in supporting the licensee. A

healthy practice is comprised of individual (practice and personal) and practice environment (organizational and supports/culture) domains.

Self-reflecting on healthy practice domains motivates licensees to engage in continuing professional development while avoiding unnecessary burdens for licensure maintenance. Identifying risks and supports within these domains, as well as ongoing development of pathways for improvement, are components of a healthy practice

Risks and Supports, and Self-reflection (Engagement)

Ongoing research points to specific risks factors that predispose licensees to lapses in competence and supports that reduce the likelihood of resultant harms. Evidence also demonstrates that licensees can mitigate harm by assessing their individual practice competence and identifying which of these risks and supports are present in their practice environments.

Identifying risks and supports requires self-reflection, which is one of the first steps in goal setting and professional development. Therefore, it is important that regulations support licensees in proactive self-reflection, which is enhanced when the individual results are confidential.

Key Elements

In addition to the self-reflection on risks and supports, the guidelines contain three additional elements. The first is an assessment of ethics and knowledge of the jurisdiction's laws and rules governing physical therapy. Unlike the other elements in these guidelines, the results of this assessment would be shared with the individual's state licensing board.

The second component is a practice/work self-inventory in which the licensee can identify strengths and weaknesses in skills and knowledge. Finally, the licensee should engage in self-reflection regarding ones risks and supports and healthy practice. Upon completion of the self-reflection, the licensee will be provided with information that would be useful in strengthening supports and mitigating risks to safe, effective, and ethical practice.

Glossary/Description of Terms

Competence: The application of knowledge, skills and behaviors required to function effectively, safely, ethically and legally within the context of the individual's role and environment.

Competency: the quality of being adequately or well qualified physically and intellectually.

Continuing Competence: The lifelong process of maintaining and documenting competence through ongoing self-assessment, development and implementation of a personal learning plan, and subsequent reassessment.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD): the systematic maintenance, improvements and broadening of knowledge and skills, and the development of professional qualities necessary for the execution of professional and technical duties through the practitioner's working life.

Engagement: the action of engaging or being engaged; to participate or become involved in.

Harms: Risks that result in a negative impact on the delivery of health care. “Harms are risks realized.”

Licensee: the holder of a license, certificate, or registration.

Practitioner: a person actively engaged in an art, discipline, or profession, especially medicine.

Risks: internal and external factors that impact professional judgment.

Self-reflection: meditation or serious thought about one's character, actions, and motives.

Supports: Resources and processes which may result in improved self-awareness of a licensee's potential risks in order to mitigate harms

Well-being: the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy. The optimal combination of personal and professional health to support the licensee in their pursuit of safe, effective, and ethical physical therapy practice.