



PHYSICAL THERAPIST

JOB DESCRIPTION

Physical therapists provide services that help restore function, improve mobility, relieve pain, and prevent or limit permanent physical disabilities of patients suffering from injuries or disease. They restore, maintain, and promote overall fitness and health. Their patients include accident victims and individuals with disabling conditions such as low-back pain, arthritis, heart disease, fractures, head injuries, and cerebral palsy. They work in such settings as hospitals, nursing homes, private practice or do contract work. Specialty areas include neurology, pulmonary therapy, musculoskeletal therapy, sports medicine and prevention.

EXPERIENCE & SKILLS

Physical therapists must enjoy helping others, have compassion and empathy, be able to articulate, and have the physical and mechanical ability essential to the position. Previous work experience in the field either in a volunteer or paid position is usually required. Essential skills needed are:

- Assessing/Analyzing
- Ability to communicate well
- Using mechanical equipment
- Report writing
- Supervisory/Leadership skills
- Physical stamina

EDUCATION & TRAINING

All States require physical therapists to pass a licensure exam before they can practice, after graduating from an accredited physical therapist educational program. According to the American Physical Therapy Association, there were 205 accredited physical therapist programs in 2004. Of the accredited programs, 94 offered master's degrees, and 111 offered doctoral degrees. All physical therapist programs seeking accreditation are required to offer degrees at the master's degree level and above, in accordance with the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education. Physical therapists are expected to continue their professional development by participating in continuing education courses and workshops. In fact, a number of States require continuing education as a condition of maintaining licensure.

SALARIES

Salaries vary depending on work setting, years of experience, specialty and region or state.

Entry level: \$42,010	Home health care services: \$64,650	General hospitals: \$60,350
Average: \$ 60,180	Nursing care facilities: \$61,720	Health practitioner offices: \$60,130
Experienced: \$71,760	Offices of physicians: \$61,270	

EMPLOYMENT & ADVANCEMENT PROSPECTS

Employment prospects are excellent. Physical therapy is one of the fastest growing occupations in the 1990's, with job opportunities expected to grow by 71% through 2006. Advancement is good and can occur when promoted to supervisor or by relocating to a larger more prestigious facility.

RELATED OCCUPATIONS

- Occupational therapists
- Speech pathologists
- Audiologists
- Respiratory therapists

REFERENCES

The American Physical Therapy Association at <http://www.apta.org>

Occupational Outlook Handbook, U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, www.bls.gov 2005-06