



American Physical Therapy Association
The Science of Healing. The Art of Caring.

APTA Background Sheet 2002

The Physical Therapist Assistant

The physical therapist assistant (PTA) is a technically educated health care provider who assists the physical therapist in the provision of physical therapy and may perform physical therapy interventions selected by the supervising physical therapist. The physical therapist assistant works under the direction and supervision of the physical therapist, helping manage conditions such as back and neck injuries, sprains/strains and fractures, arthritis, burns, amputations, stroke, multiple sclerosis, birth defects, injuries related to work and sports, and others.

What Do Physical Therapist Assistants Earn?

The median income for a physical therapist assistant is \$30,000 depending on position, years of experience, degree of education, geographic location, and practice setting.

Where Do Physical Therapist Assistants Work?

Physical therapist assistants work in a broad range of settings, including the following:

- Hospitals
- Outpatient clinics or offices
- Rehabilitation facilities
- Skilled nursing, extended care, or subacute facilities
- Homes
- Schools
- Hospices
- Industrial, workplace, or other occupational environments
- Fitness centers and sports training facilities

What Are the Educational Requirements for Becoming a PTA?

Physical therapist assistants must complete a two-year education program, typically offered through a community or junior college. Candidates receive an associate's degree upon graduation. The course of study usually includes one year of general education and one year of technical courses on physical therapy procedures and clinical experience. There are 251 accredited physical therapist assistant education programs throughout the country.

What Are the Licensure Requirements for Becoming a PTA?

More than 40 states require physical therapist assistants to be licensed, registered, or certified. States requiring licensure stipulate specific educational and examination criteria.

What Is the Employment Outlook for Physical Therapy?

Employment conditions for physical therapist assistants continue to improve. There is currently an unemployment rate of 3.9 percent, down from 4.2 percent in spring 2001.

For more information on a career in physical therapy, visit our Web site at www.apta.org or contact APTA Public Relations, 1111 North Fairfax Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-1488, phone: 703/706-3248, fax: 703/706-8578.