

## Introduction

The physical therapy degree is recognized as a professional degree requiring the development of entry-level knowledge and skills in multiple domains of health care. Physical therapist education requires acquisition and retention of knowledge and skills as well as development of judgment through a wide range of learning activities and mentored patient care experiences in preparation for making appropriate, independent decisions required for autonomous clinical practice. The current practice of physical therapy emphasizes collaboration among physical therapists, other health care professionals, the patient, and the patient's family/caregivers.

**The purpose of this document is to assure that all students entering the Lincoln Memorial University (LMU) Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) Program are aware of and understand the requirements of our program and the profession, so that informed decisions can be made regarding pursuit of this profession.** These technical standards and essential functions are in turn linked to student success within our program and achievement of the LMU DPT Program Goals and the Minimum Required Skills of Physical Therapist Graduates at Entry-Level by graduation.

## Policy

The DPT Program has the responsibility to the public to assure that its graduates are fully competent and caring physical therapists. Thus, it is important that students possess the *intelligence, integrity, compassion, social responsibility, and physical and emotional capacity* necessary to acquire the skills needed to practice physical therapy. The LMU DPT Program endeavors to select applicants who have the ability to become highly competent physical therapists. Admission and progression decisions are based on prior academic achievement, related requirements, and possession of the minimum non-academic standards described within this document. These technical standards and essential functions are an integral requirement for participation in the academic and clinical program, for graduation, and for practice as a physical therapist.

The Lincoln Memorial University Physical Therapy Program, in accordance with Federal and Tennessee State law, is committed to equal opportunity and a nondiscriminatory environment for all persons. No qualified person with a disability shall be excluded from admission, participation, or denied benefits or subjected to discrimination solely by reason of his or her disability. It is the responsibility of the student with disabilities to request those accommodations that they feel are reasonable and are needed to execute the essential requirements described. Each semester, students are required to request accommodations for disabilities. Upon approval, reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with disabilities; however, it is necessary that each student be able to demonstrate the technical standards and essential functions of a physical therapist with or without reasonable accommodation.

The procedures for dissemination and acknowledgment of these technical standards and essential skills are as follows:

- All applicants will be referred to this document through posting on the website and provided in hard copy upon acceptance to the program.
- Accepted students (and parents/guardians if the student is <18 years of age) will be asked to review and sign this document before the beginning of their first semester in the Physical Therapy Program.
- Any questions or concerns regarding the technical standards and essential skills should be directed to the Program Director of the Physical Therapy Program. Students with documented disabilities may meet with personnel from the Academic Support Services and/or Accessible Education Services when reviewing/signing.
- This document will be reviewed with students throughout the Physical Therapy Program in related meetings and courses.

## **Technical Standards and Essential Functions for Physical Therapy Practice**

Technical standards and essential functions refer to those physical, cognitive and behavioral abilities required for satisfactory completion of all aspects of the curriculum, and the development of professional attributes required by the profession of all students at graduation. The technical standards and essential functions required by the curriculum are in the following areas: *communication; intellectual (conceptual, integrative and quantitative abilities); sensory/observation; motor; and the behavioral and social aspects of the performance of a physical therapist.*

**A. Communication:** The student must be able to communicate in English clearly, effectively and efficiently with instructors, fellow students, patients and family/caregivers, physicians and other members of the health care team verbally, non-verbally and in written formats. These communication skills require the ability to examine all information provided including the recognition of the significance of non-verbal communication. Immediate evaluation of information provided is necessary to allow for appropriate, focused follow-up inquiry. Communication skills include the ability to identify and seek out sources of feedback, and to effectively use and provide feedback for improving personal interaction. The student must be capable of responsive, empathetic, active listening to establish rapport in a way that promotes openness on issues of concern and competence with respect to cultural differences.

Upon completion of relevant course work, the student must be able to clearly, effectively and efficiently communicate across the elements of patient/client management from examination through intervention and outcomes/discharge planning. Such tasks require the ability to

communicate with both the patient and family/caregivers. The student must be able to process and communicate information on the patient's status with accuracy in a timely manner to physical therapist colleagues and other members of the health care team. This information then needs to be communicated in a succinct yet comprehensive manner and in settings where available time is limited. Effective communication also relies on the student's ability to use appropriate judgment in seeking supervision and consultation in a timely manner as well as effectively addressing any potential cultural considerations. Documentation of the elements of patient/client management from examination through intervention and outcomes/discharge planning in a variety of formats (written or electronic) must be complete and accurate.

**B. Intellectual:** To be successful in coursework, a student must have the cognitive abilities necessary to master relevant content in basic science and clinical courses at a level deemed appropriate by the PT profession. These skills may be described as the ability to comprehend, apply, analyze, and synthesize material. They must be able to develop reasoning and decision-making skills appropriate to the practice of physical therapy. The student must possess the ability to recognize and define problems, analyze data, develop and implement solutions, and evaluate outcomes.

Upon completion of relevant course work, the student must demonstrate the ability to question logically; to identify, generate, and evaluate elements of logical argument; to recognize and differentiate facts, illusions, assumptions, and hidden assumptions; and to distinguish the relevant from the irrelevant. The student must be able to recognize the limits of his/her/their ability, request assistance when necessary, and create a professional development plan based on needs assessment.

**C. Sensory/Observation:** The student must have the ability to perceive information presented in course work through visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile means from lectures/labs, written materials, and other various electronic media. Students must be able to personally observe demonstrations, experiments, and laboratory exercises in basic science and clinical course work. They must be able to accurately observe an individual for the purpose of patient/client management. The student must have the ability to discern and comprehend dimensional and spatial relationships of structures.

Upon completion of relevant course work, the student must be able to discern skin, subcutaneous masses, muscles, ligament, tendon, bones, joints, nerves, lymph nodes, and intra-abdominal organs through palpation. The student must be able to perceive the presence of abnormalities in a specific body system such as masses in the abdomen. The student must also be capable of perceiving the signs of disease through visual, auditory, tactile and olfactory means as manifested throughout the physical examination. This process includes, but is not limited to, information that is derived from observation and palpation of the body surfaces, palpable changes in various organs and tissues, and auditory information such as patient voice, and heart and lung sounds.

**D. Motor:** The student must have sufficient motor function to effectively move themselves and others in order to learn and competently perform the psychomotor tasks required for physical

examinations and physical therapy interventions. A major component of the practice of physical therapy is the hands-on examination and management of movement disorders.

Upon completion of relevant course work, the student must demonstrate psychomotor skills related to patient/client management such as performance of tests and measures as well as implementation of interventions such as therapeutic handling, transfer and gait training, wound debridement and care, and thrust and non-thrust manipulation. The student must have the ability to move him/her/them self and the patient in three-dimensional space in order to complete tasks related to patient/client management from examination through intervention. Additionally, the student must be able to physically ensure the safety of themselves and patients at all times.

**E. Behavioral and Social:** The student must demonstrate personal attributes of compassion, caring, altruism, integrity, and social responsibility, as well as cultural competence. They must possess the emotional health and stability required for full application and use of their intellectual abilities, the exercise of good judgment, the prompt and effective completion of all responsibilities effectively under stress and to adapt to an environment that may change rapidly without warning and/or in unpredictable ways. The student is expected to interact with others in a respectful and responsible manner at all times. The student must be able to accept and respond to constructive criticism and resolve conflicts in a socially acceptable and professional manner. They must use time effectively in obtaining maximum benefit from a minimum investment of time and resources.

Upon completion of relevant course work, the student must be able to understand and demonstrate the basis and content of professional and ethical physical therapy practice. The student must possess skills of a reflective practitioner including the ability to self-assess, self-correct, and self-direct; to identify needs and sources of learning; and to continually seek new knowledge and understanding.

## **Conclusion**

The faculty of the Physical Therapy Program recognizes its responsibility to present candidates for the DPT degree that have the knowledge and skills to function in a broad variety of clinical situations and render the full spectrum of entry level physical therapy patient care.

Any person denied admission or who is unable to successfully complete the Physical Therapy Program solely due to their disability has the right to appeal the decision in accordance procedures governed by the Office of Accessible Education Services.