

Physiotherapy Support Personnel

A Guide for Physiotherapists

*Published
September 2006*



Nova Scotia College of Physiotherapists
Post Office Box 22, Smiths Cove, NS B0S 1S0
(P) 902-221-7254 (F) 902-245-3134



Support personnel assist the physiotherapist¹ in the application of treatment techniques and modalities characteristic of their professional training and clinical judgment. Physiotherapy support personnel job titles shall include the physiotherapy/rehabilitation assistant (group 1) or the physiotherapy/ rehabilitation aide (group 2).

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Support personnel must work under the supervision of a physiotherapist.
- Physiotherapists maintain responsibility and accountability for the quality of the supervision provided.
- Physiotherapists are required to make a judgment about the knowledge, skills and abilities of the support personnel prior to assigning tasks.
- Decision to delegate to the support personnel includes factors such as education, training, competence, the environment and the client needs.
- Physiotherapists are to obtain informed consent from each client for the involvement of a physiotherapy support personnel in the delivery of their physiotherapy treatment plan.

Support personnel vary in their level of preparation, in the amount and type of education and/or training. The Nova Scotia College of Physiotherapists accepts these groupings as defined below:

Physiotherapy/Rehabilitation Assistant (Group 1 Physiotherapy Support Personnel)

The educational background of all physiotherapy/rehabilitation assistants includes all of the following:

1. A curriculum that prepares students for physiotherapy practice models in Canada.
2. A broadly ranging curriculum to match the variety of physiotherapy environments and client populations.
3. A college diploma/certificate from a recognized post-secondary program that includes a minimum of three terms full time equivalent study of which:
 - One term's equivalent must be in physiotherapy-specific coursework (e.g., use of ambulatory aids, electrotherapy modality instruction, the principles of therapeutic exercise) that includes classroom and laboratory work; and
 - One term's equivalent in physiotherapist-supervised training/fieldwork; and
 - One term's equivalent of generic, program related coursework (e.g., anatomy, physiology)
4. Educational program faculty includes registered physiotherapist(s).

Physiotherapy/Rehabilitation Aide (Group 2 Physiotherapist Support Personnel)

The educational background of all physiotherapy/rehabilitation aides includes all of the following:

1. Completion of 'on-the-job' training that:
 - Prepares the personnel for the provision of physiotherapy services in that specific work setting.
 - Is directed by a licensed physiotherapist.
 - Is physiotherapy-specific.
 - Can be variable in length and content depending on the background of the support personnel and the needs of the client(s).
2. Physiotherapy/rehabilitation aides may have various levels and types of formal education, but their education does not meet all aspects of the criteria for physiotherapy/rehabilitation assistants.
3. Guidelines for on-the-job training are available through the NSCP at www.nsphysio.com and are available to licensed physiotherapists only.

It is assumed that Physiotherapy/Rehabilitation Aides are a heterogeneous group with a large variation in educational background. As a result, fewer assumptions about knowledge, skills and attitudes can be made of everyone within this group.

PHYSIOTHERAPIST RESPONSIBILITIES:

The physiotherapist maintains responsibility for the physiotherapy treatment delivered to all clients under his/her care. It is, therefore, **always** the responsibility of the physiotherapist to:

- **Interpret referrals and obtain informed consent,**
- **Conduct initial and ongoing assessments of the client and interpret the findings,**
- **Formulate the treatment plan, with goals, in consultation with the client,**
- **Decide what, if any, components or modifications of the treatment plan can be safely delegated to a physiotherapy support personnel,**
- **Ensure appropriate documentation,**
- **Re-evaluate and/or modify treatment plan and goals,**
- **Provide appropriate education to clients, families and other caregivers,**
- **Conduct discharge planning.**

The physiotherapist is accountable for the appropriate assignment of duties to the physiotherapy support personnel under his/her supervision, and shall not delegate to a less qualified person:

- Any task that the physiotherapist has not observed the support personnel perform competently, or
- Any task that requires the unique skill, knowledge and judgment of a physiotherapist, or
- A task or procedure in a situation where risk requires the continuous clinical judgment of a physiotherapist.

¹ Physiotherapy, physiotherapist, physical therapy, physical therapist, physiothérapeute, physiothérapeute, PT, and pht are official marks used with permission.