

CAREER GUIDE FOR PHYSICAL THERAPIST ASSISTANTS

SOC Code: 31-2021

Pay Band(s): 3 ([Salary Structure](#))

Standard Occupational Description: Assist physical therapists in providing physical therapy treatments and procedures. May, in accordance with State laws, assist in the development of treatment plans, carry out routine functions, document the progress of treatment, and modify specific treatments in accordance with patient status and within the scope of treatment plans established by a physical therapist. Generally requires formal training.

Physical Therapist Assistant positions in the Commonwealth are assigned to the following Roles in the [Rehabilitation Therapies Career Group](#):

[Therapist Assistant/Therapist I](#)

While Physical Therapist Assistants within the Commonwealth are all located within the Rehabilitation Therapies Career Group, individuals may want to pursue other opportunities within the Commonwealth depending upon individual training, education, knowledge, skills, abilities, and interests.

Other Career Group(s) that may be of interest are:

[Health Care Compliance](#)

[Direct Service](#)

[Administration and Office Support](#)

SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, ABILITIES AND TASKS

(Technical and Functional Expertise)

Skills

Note: *The technical and functional skills listed below are based on general occupational qualifications for Physical Therapist Assistants commonly recognized by most employers. Typically, you will not be required to have all of the skills listed to be a successful performer. Recruitment and selection standards for an individual state job must be based on the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for that job as indicated in the job announcement and job description in the Employee Work Profile.*

1. Talking to others to convey information effectively.
2. Teaching others how to do something.
3. Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work related documents.
4. Monitoring/Assessing performance of yourself, other individuals, or organizations to make improvements or take corrective action.
5. Being aware of others' reactions and understanding why they react as they do.
6. Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.
7. Actively looking for ways to help people.
8. Selecting and using training/instructional methods and procedures appropriate for the situation when learning or teaching new things.
9. Generating or adapting equipment and technology to serve user needs.
10. Using scientific rules and methods to solve problems.

Knowledge

Note: The technical and functional knowledge statements listed below are based on general occupational qualifications for Physical Therapist Assistants commonly recognized by most employers. Typically, you will not be required to have all of the knowledge listed to be a successful performer. Recruitment and selection standards for an individual state job must be based on the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for that job as indicated in the job announcement and job description in the Employee Work Profile.

The **Knowledge** of:

1. Principles, methods, and procedures for diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of physical and mental dysfunctions, and for career counseling and guidance.
2. Principles and processes for providing customer and personal services. This includes customer needs assessment, meeting quality standards for services, and evaluation of customer satisfaction.
3. Principles and methods for curriculum and training design, teaching and instruction for individuals and groups, and the measurement of training effects.
4. Administrative and clerical procedures and systems such as word processing, managing files and records, stenography and transcription, designing forms, and other office procedures and terminology.
5. Plant and animal organisms, their tissues, cells, functions, interdependencies, and interactions with each other and the environment.
6. Human behavior and performance; individual differences in ability, personality, and interests; learning and motivation; psychological research methods; and the assessment and treatment of behavioral and affective disorders.
7. Structure and content of the English language including the meaning and spelling of words, rules of composition, and grammar.

Abilities

Note: The technical and functional abilities listed below are based on general occupational qualifications for Physical Therapist Assistants commonly recognized by most employers. Typically, you will not be required to have all of the abilities listed to be a successful performer. Recruitment and selection standards for an individual state job must be based on the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for that job as indicated in the job announcement and job description in the Employee Work Profile.

The **Ability** to:

1. Communicate information and ideas in speaking so others will understand.
2. Listen to and understand information and ideas presented through spoken words and sentences.
3. Tell when something is wrong or is likely to go wrong. It does not involve solving the problem, only recognizing there is a problem.
4. Read and understand information and ideas presented in writing.
5. Speak clearly so others can understand you.

Tasks

Note: The following is a list of sample tasks typically performed by Physical therapist Assistants. Employees in this occupation will not necessarily perform all of the tasks listed.

1. Administer active and passive manual therapeutic exercises, therapeutic massage, and heat, light, sound, water, and electrical modality treatments, such as ultrasound.

2. Administer traction to relieve neck and back pain, using intermittent and static traction equipment.
3. Assist patients to dress, undress, and put on and remove supportive devices, such as braces, splints, and slings.
4. Confer with physical therapy staff and others to discuss and evaluate patient information for planning, modifying, and coordinating treatment.
5. Fit patients for orthopedic braces, prostheses, and supportive devices, such as crutches.
6. Instruct, motivate, safeguard and assist patients as they practice exercises and functional activities.
7. Measure patients' range-of-joint motion, body parts, and vital signs to determine effects of treatments or for patient evaluations.
8. Monitor operation of equipment and record use of equipment and administration of treatment.
9. Observe patients during treatments to compile and evaluate data on patients' responses and progress, and report to physical therapist.
10. Train patients in the use of orthopedic braces, prostheses, and supportive devices.

INTERESTED?

Like people, occupations have traits or characteristics. These characteristics give important clues about the nature of the work and work environment, and give you an opportunity to match your own personal interests to a specific occupation. When you choose a job in an occupation that matches your own interests you have taken an important step in planning a successful and rewarding career.

Occupations as Physical Therapist Assistants are considered **Social** occupations and frequently involve working with, communicating with, and teaching people. These occupations often involve helping or providing service to others.

These occupations are also considered **Realistic** occupations and frequently involve work activities that include practical, hands-on problems and solutions. They often deal with plants, animals, and real-world materials like wood, tools, and machinery.

LICENSURE, REGISTRATION, OR CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

It is nationally recognized that the occupation of physical therapist assistant is a health field career and is regulated to ensure competent delivery of health care services to citizens. Therefore licensure is expected.

Licensure is required for Physical Therapist Assistant positions in state government.

The Virginia Board of Physical Therapy provides requirements for licensure and continuing competency for this occupation. Licensing information for Physical Therapist Assistants can be found on the Department of Health Professions web site at <http://www.dhp.state.va.us/>.

EDUCATIONAL, TRAINING, AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The Department of Labor, Bureau of Statistics provides the following:

Physical therapist assistants and aides perform components of physical therapy procedures and related tasks selected by a supervising physical therapist. These workers assist physical therapists in providing services that help improve mobility, relieve pain, and prevent or limit permanent physical disabilities of patients suffering from injuries or disease. Patients include accident victims and individuals with disabling conditions such as low-back pain, arthritis, heart disease, fractures, head injuries, and cerebral palsy.

Physical therapist assistants perform a variety of tasks. Components of treatment procedures performed by these workers, under the direction and supervision of physical therapists, involve exercises, massages, electrical stimulation, paraffin baths, hot and cold packs, traction, and ultrasound. Physical therapist assistants record the patient's responses to treatment and report the outcome of each treatment to the physical therapist.

Physical therapist aides are trained on the job, but physical therapist assistants typically earn an associate degree from an accredited physical therapist assistant program. Not all States require licensure or registration in order for the physical therapist assistant to practice. The States that require licensure stipulate specific educational and examination criteria. Complete information on practice acts and regulations can be obtained from the State licensing boards. Additional requirements may include certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and other first aid and a minimum number of hours of clinical experience.

Accredited physical therapist assistant programs are designed to last 2 years, or 4 semesters, and culminate in an associate degree. Programs are divided into academic study and hands-on clinical experience. Academic course work includes algebra, anatomy and physiology, biology, chemistry, and psychology. Many programs require that students complete a semester of anatomy and physiology and have certifications in CPR and other first aid even before they begin their clinical field experience. Both educators and prospective employers view clinical experience as integral to ensuring that students understand the responsibilities of a physical therapist assistant.

Graduation from an approved program for physical therapist assistant is required to practice as a Physical Therapist Assistant in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The Virginia Board of Physical Therapy and the Virginia Regulations Governing the Practice of Physical Therapy require continuing course work. The classroom or educational experience is directly related to the clinical practice of physical therapy and approved or provided by one of the following organizations:

- The Virginia Physical Therapy Association;
- The American Physical Therapy Association;
- Local, state or federal government agencies;
- Regionally accredited colleges and universities;
- Health care organizations accredited by the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations;
- The American Medical Association-Category I Continuing Medical Education course; and
- The National Athletic Trainers Association.

The Virginia Area Health Education Centers Program lists the following Virginia educational institutions offering physical therapist assistant program: College of Health Sciences, John Tyler Community College, Northern Virginia Community College, Tidewater Community College, and Wytheville Community College.

The American Physical Therapy Association is a national professional organization that fosters advancement in physical therapy practice, research and education. This organization offers additional educational and learning opportunities including specialty certification. Educational information may be found on their website: <http://www.apta.org>.

COMMONWEALTH COMPETENCIES

Competencies are a set of identified behaviors, knowledge, skills, and abilities that directly and positively impact the success of employees and the organization. Competencies can be observed and measured. When consistently demonstrated, competencies make employees particularly effective in their work. Competencies help lay out a road map to career success. You can use the Commonwealth Competencies to help improve your individual performance by adopting behaviors that make high performing employees successful in their jobs. In this way, you can use the Commonwealth Competencies for your further professional development.

The Commonwealth Competencies are:

1. Technical and Functional Expertise
2. Understanding the Business
3. Achieving Results
4. Serving the Customer
5. Teamwork
6. Interpersonal and Communication Skills
7. Leadership and Personal Effectiveness

The above competencies may be applied to employees throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. They can be rank-ordered by agencies and hiring managers to represent the needs of a specific job. The rank ordering will change depending upon the occupation, an organization's priorities, the actual job requirements, and the supervisor's preferences.

Career success is both about what you do (applying your technical knowledge, skills, and ability) and how you do it (the consistent behaviors you demonstrate and choose to use) while interacting and communicating with others. Hopefully, by studying the Commonwealth competencies, identifying your developmental opportunities, and working to refine your own competence, you can take charge of your career!

For additional information about the **Commonwealth Competencies** go to: http://jobs.state.va.us/cc_planningctr.htm. For the competencies, we first list the competencies and then define each. Finally, we list competency indicators; to describe what successful performance looks like.

COMMONWEALTH CAREER PATH

Career opportunities in the Commonwealth are not limited to moving "up" to the next highest role and pay band, changing positions, or to becoming a supervisor. That's because most roles

describe a broad group of occupationally related positions that perform a range of work that requires increased knowledge and skills. For that reason, Commonwealth roles describe the career paths within the same or higher-level role for the same or different Career Group. The broad salary range and the Commonwealth’s pay practices provide flexibility in recognizing career development and advancement. ([Salary Structure](#))

For example: **Physical Therapist Assistant**

PAY BAND	PRACTITIONER ROLES
3	THERAPIST ASSISTANT/THERAPIST I

PAY BAND	MANAGEMENT ROLES

Sample Career Path

Therapist Assistant/Therapist I role provides a career track for the occupational and physical therapists assistants based on licensure/certification requirements. The career track is for assistants to physical therapists and requires certification or licensure by the Virginia Board of Physical Therapy.

ADDITIONAL OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND AT:

O*NET (Occupational Information Network)

http://online.onetcenter.org/gen_search_page

Virginia Employment Commission

<http://www.alex.vec.state.va.us/>

Career One Stop

<http://www.careeronestop.org/>

Virginia Career Resource Network <http://www.vacrn.net/>

Department of Health Professions

<http://www.dhp.state.virginia.us/>

Professional Organizations

American Physical Therapy Association

<http://www.apta.org/>

Virginia Physical Therapy Association

<http://www.vpta.org/>