

CAREER GUIDE FOR PHYSICAL THERAPISTS

SOC Code: 29-1123

Pay Band(s): 5 and 6 ([Salary Structure](#))

Standard Occupational Description: Assess, plan, organize, and participate in rehabilitative programs that improve mobility, relieve pain, increase strength, and decrease or prevent deformity of patients suffering from disease or injury.

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

[Therapist III](#)

[Therapy Manager II](#)

While Physical Therapists 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](#)

[Program Administration](#)

[General Administration](#)

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 Therapists 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. 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.
2. Teaching others how to do something.
3. Managing one's own time and the time of others.
4. Talking to others to convey information effectively.
5. Using logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions or approaches to problems.
6. Selecting and using training/instructional methods and procedures appropriate for the situation when learning or teaching new things.
7. Using scientific rules and methods to solve problems.
8. Understanding the implications of new information for both current and future problem solving and decision-making.
9. Monitoring/Assessing performance of yourself, other individuals, or organizations to make improvements or take corrective action.

10. Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work related documents.

Knowledge

Note: *The technical and functional knowledge statements listed below are based on general occupational qualifications for Physical Therapists 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. The information and techniques needed to diagnose and treat human injuries, diseases, and deformities. This includes symptoms, treatment alternatives, drug properties and interactions, and preventive health-care measures.
2. Principles, methods, and procedures for diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of physical and mental dysfunctions, and for career counseling and guidance.
3. Principles and processes for providing customer and personal services. This includes customer needs assessment, meeting quality standards for services, and evaluation of customer satisfaction.
4. Principles and methods for curriculum and training design, teaching and instruction for individuals and groups, and the measurement of training effects.
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.
8. Group behavior and dynamics, societal trends and influences, human migrations, ethnicity, cultures and their history and origins.

Abilities

Note: *The technical and functional abilities listed below are based on general occupational qualifications for Physical Therapists 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. Listen to and understand information and ideas presented through spoken words and sentences.
2. Communicate information and ideas in speaking so others will understand.
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.
6. Apply general rules to specific problems to produce answers that make sense.
7. Combine pieces of information to form general rules or conclusions (includes finding a relationship among seemingly unrelated events).
8. See details at close range (within a few feet of the observer).
9. Arrange things or actions in a certain order or pattern according to a specific rule or set of rules (e.g., patterns of numbers, letters, words, pictures, mathematical operations).
10. Identify and understand the speech of another person.

Tasks

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

1. Plan, prepare and carry out individually designed programs of physical treatment to maintain, improve or restore physical functioning, alleviate pain and prevent physical dysfunction in patients.
2. Perform and document an initial exam, evaluating the data to identify problems and determine a diagnosis prior to intervention.
3. Evaluate effects of treatment at various stages and adjust treatments to achieve maximum benefit.
4. Administer manual exercises, massage and/or traction to help relieve pain, increase the patient's strength, and decrease or prevent deformity and crippling.
5. Instruct patient and family in treatment procedures to be continued at home.
6. Confer with the patient, medical practitioners and appropriate others to plan, implement and assess the intervention program.
7. Review physician's referral and patient's medical records to help determine diagnosis and physical therapy treatment required.
8. Record prognosis, treatment, response, and progress in patient's chart or enter information into computer.
9. Obtain patients' informed consent to proposed interventions.
10. Discharge patient from physical therapy when goals or projected outcomes have been attained and provide for appropriate follow-up care or referrals.

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 in Physical Therapy are considered **Social** occupations because they 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** because they 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. Many of the occupations require working outside, and do not involve a lot of paperwork or working closely with others.

Physical Therapy occupations are considered **Investigative** because they frequently involve working with ideas, and require an extensive amount of thinking. These occupations can involve searching for facts and figuring out problems mentally.

LICENSURE, REGISTRATION, OR CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

It is nationally recognized that physical therapy is a health field career and is regulated to ensure competent delivery of health care services to citizens. Therefore professional standards and competencies including licensure are expected.

All States require physical therapists to pass a licensure exam before they can practice, after graduating from an accredited physical therapist educational program.

Licensure is required for Physical Therapist 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 can be found on the Department of Health Professions web site at <http://www.dhp.state.virginia.us/>.

EDUCATIONAL, TRAINING, AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

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

Physical therapists (PTs) 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.

The job can be physically demanding because therapists often have to stoop, kneel, crouch, lift, and stand for long periods. In addition, physical therapists move heavy equipment and lift patients or help them turn, stand, or walk.

Some physical therapists treat a wide range of ailments; others specialize in areas such as pediatrics, geriatrics, orthopedics, sports medicine, neurology, and cardiopulmonary physical therapy.

Physical therapist must graduate from an accredited physical therapist educational program. 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 therapist programs start with basic science courses such as biology, chemistry, and physics and then introduce specialized courses, including biomechanics, neuroanatomy, human growth and development, manifestations of disease, examination techniques, and therapeutic procedures. Besides getting classroom and laboratory instruction, students receive supervised clinical experience. Among the courses that are useful when one applies to a physical therapist educational program are anatomy, biology, chemistry, social science, mathematics, and physics. Before granting admission, many professional education programs require experience as a volunteer in a physical therapy department of a hospital or clinic.

Physical therapists should have strong interpersonal skills in order to be able to educate patients about their physical therapy treatments. PTs also should be compassionate and possess a desire to help patients. Similar traits are needed to interact with the patient's family.

Physical therapists are expected to continue their professional development by participating in continuing education courses and workshops.

In addition to graduating from an approved physical therapy program, the Virginia Regulations Governing the Practice of Physical Therapy requires 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.

According to the Virginia Area Health Education Centers Program five educational institutions offer physical therapy programs. Those educational institutions are Hampton University, Marymount University, Old Dominion University, Shenandoah University, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Virginia Wesleyan 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**

PAY BAND	PRACTITIONER ROLES
5	THERAPIST III

PAY BAND	MANAGEMENT ROLES
6	THERAPY MANAGER II

Sample Career Path

Therapist III role provides a career track for licensed physical therapists performing responsibilities ranging from entry level to first line supervisor. Physical therapists help clients restore function, improve mobility, relieve pain, and prevent or limit permanent physical disabilities. Physical therapists provide direct therapy services to clients with some positions concentrating on more comprehensive and specialized treatment approaches.

Therapy Manager II role provides career tracks for managers responsible for planning and directing a physical therapy program that may include other rehabilitative therapies. The Virginia Board of Physical Therapy requires licensure of these employees.

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/>