



## Physical Therapist Assistant Program



### **What is a Physical Therapist Assistant?**

Physical therapist assistants (PTAs) work as members of the health care team to provide physical therapy services under the direction and supervision of a physical therapist (PT). The PT is responsible for the patient evaluation and development of a plan of care to help a patient reduce pain, improve his ability to move, restore function, and reduce or prevent disability. PTAs assist the PTs in providing the treatments to help the patients achieve their goals. These treatments may include exercise instruction and appropriate progression, data collection such as heart rate and blood pressure to ensure proper response to exercise, use of physical and electrical modalities, functional training/retraining, such as rolling, walking, and balance improvement.

### **Who are the patients with whom a PTA works?**

Patients can range in age from neonates to frail, ill elders on hospice and anyone in between or anyone with a medical problem or health-related condition that limits one's ability to perform necessary daily activities, whether as simple as combing one's hair or as complex as on the job duties.

### **Where does a PTA work?**

PTAs work in variety of settings to include hospitals, inpatient rehabilitation facilities, nursing homes, home health agencies, outpatient clinics, school districts, industrial/occupational centers, sports training and fitness facilities, and private practice.

### **What skills does a PTA require?**

Besides a strong background in anatomy, physiology, and biomechanics, a PTA needs to have a desire to work closely with other people, a caring personality, strong communication and problem solving skills, and an ability to understand patients on all levels, including physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and cultural. PTAs also need a moderate degree of physical strength as they may need to lift heavy patients, stand for long periods of time, squat, kneel, and reach in order to accomplish patient treatments.

### **What are the educational and licensure requirements for a PTA?**

In order to work as a PTA, a student must graduate with an associate degree from an accredited PTA program at a technical or community college, college, or university. There are currently 351 PTA programs across the country. **There are separate educational programs and requirements for those interested in becoming physical therapists. Most programs are 6-7 years in length and culminate in a clinical doctorate degree. Graduating from an accredited PTA program is not a pre-requisite to becoming a PT, nor will the technical credits transfer to a PT program.** Forty-eight states, including Missouri, and the District of Columbia require PTAs to be licensed, registered, or certified. States requiring licensure stipulate specific educational and examination criteria. The *Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy* administers the standardized test that PTAs need to pass in order to be licensed and practice as PTAs. In order to maintain licensure, PTAs need to accumulate a state mandated number of continuing education hours and pay a state mandated fee every two years.

### **What is the career outlook for PTAs?**

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment is expected to grow by 27% nationally from 2018 to 2028, which is faster than the average for all occupations. This is especially due to the Baby Boomer generation moving into the age group of those over 65.

### **What is the salary range for PTAs?**

According to the American Physical Therapy Association and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median annual wages of a PTA across all settings is \$48,090. The salary ranges from \$33,780 for the lowest paid 10% to \$79,810 for the highest paid 10% of PTAs as of May 2018. Salaries depend on the setting in which the PTA works as well as experience. Settings employing the largest numbers of PTAs in May 2018 are outpatient physical therapy clinics and hospitals but many PTAs also work in skilled nursing homes and home health.

References:

<http://www.apta.org/PTACareers/Overview/>  
<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/physical-therapist-assistants-and-aides.htm>  
<http://www.capectonline.org/home.aspx>



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