

# Essential skills and attributes required for the study of Physiotherapy

## Introduction

The Dalhousie University School of Physiotherapy is responsible to society for providing its enrolled students with opportunities to develop the qualifications (academic knowledge, professional behaviours, attitudes and clinical skills) to enter the profession of Physiotherapy. The purpose of this document is to describe the skills and attributes required for success in completing a university program in Physiotherapy: students interested in pursuing a degree in physiotherapy are encouraged to review the following document that outlines the requisite skills and attributes for the profession.

An offer of admission to the School of Physiotherapy at Dalhousie University program should not be interpreted as evidence that the Physiotherapy program has independently verified an applicant's skills and attributes in the domains described below. These skills and attributes are essential if students are to be successful in achieving the competency standards of the profession.

The competency standards for Physiotherapy are described in the *Essential Competency Profile for Physiotherapists in Canada*<sup>1</sup>. For this reason, students admitted to the School of Physiotherapy must possess the skills and abilities described below in order to be able to develop the competencies required of an entry-to-practice physiotherapist. Students must be able to demonstrate sound clinical and professional judgment and demonstrate responsible decision making to become graduates who are cognizant of practice accountability issues, laws, regulations, professional codes of ethics and standards of practice.

In addition to obtaining a degree in physiotherapy, an individual must pass the Canadian Physiotherapy Competency Examination (PCE) in order to obtain registration/licensure as a Physiotherapist in most jurisdictions in Canada. The PCE has two components: a Written Component and a Clinical Component. Prospective candidates should be aware that the Clinical Component requires candidates to demonstrate knowledge, skills and behaviours in communication, physical

examination, analysis, evaluation, intervention planning and execution all in timed simulations of patient encounters<sup>2</sup>.

It is anticipated that reasonable accommodation may be provided to individuals who demonstrate such a requirement. The following description of skills and attributes is not intended to preclude individuals who may require reasonable accommodation. Students who anticipate that reasonable accommodation will enable them to meet the required standards for these skills and abilities are responsible for articulating their requirements. Requests for accommodation or an extension of time to complete the program are considered on a case-by-case basis according to the applicable policies, regulations and procedures. Applicants are strongly encouraged to seek out and review the policies, regulations and procedures regarding accommodation at Dalhousie University.

## Description of the Skills and Attributes for Students in a Master's entry-level program in Physiotherapy

### *Aptitude and attitude*

Students seeking to enter School of Physiotherapy at Dalhousie University must have an interest in human movement, health and a desire to assist individuals to maximize their mobility, function and life participation. They must demonstrate sensitivity, compassion, integrity, and concern for others. Students must have the cognitive abilities to understand and develop the theoretical knowledge and technical expertise to work collaboratively with their peers, patients, and colleagues. They must be respectful of individuality and diversity, build trusting relationships, demonstrate excellent interpersonal skills to engage and motivate patients and families, demonstrate creative problem solving skills and be able to manage multiple, potentially competing demands.

### *Information gathering skills*

Students must be able to participate in learning situations that require skill in gathering information about a patient in the course of an assessment. This information is typically acquired through observing and listening to the patient, the use of assessment tools, and palpating parts of the body. Gathering information also includes reading charts or other written documentation, and the appropriate use of other media such as electronic journals and databases.

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<sup>1</sup> The Essential Competency Profile for Physiotherapists in Canada was revised in October 2009 by a partnership of the Accreditation Council for Canadian Physiotherapy Academic Programs, the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators, the Canadian Physiotherapy Association and the Canadian Council of Physiotherapy University Programs. The document is available at: [http://physiotherapy.dal.ca/Files/Profile\\_2009\\_English.pdf](http://physiotherapy.dal.ca/Files/Profile_2009_English.pdf)

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<sup>2</sup> For more complete information about the Physiotherapy Competency Examination, consult the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators at: [http://www.alliancept.org/exams\\_candidates\\_overview.php](http://www.alliancept.org/exams_candidates_overview.php)

### ***Communication skills***

Students must be able to speak, hear and observe patients in order to effectively and efficiently elicit information, describe mood, activity, posture and perceive non-verbal communication. Students must be able to communicate effectively and sensitively with patients, families and any member of the health care team. Students must be able to coherently summarize a patient's condition, assessment and intervention plan verbally and in text (handwritten or electronic) to comply with regulatory and organizational record-keeping standards.

Students should note that the level of communication proficiency (both verbal and written) required is often higher than is generally assessed in standard tests of English language fluency. Students with less than full proficiency in the language of the Dalhousie School of Physiotherapy (English) are responsible for achieving the high level of communication ability that is required for patient safety, informed consent and fully independent and ethical interaction with patients.

### ***Critical thinking skills***

Students must demonstrate the cognitive skills and memory necessary to measure, calculate, and reason in order to analyze, integrate and synthesize information. In addition, students must be able to comprehend multidimensional and spatial relationships. These comprehensive problem solving activities must be done in an acceptable timeframe relative to their peers. Students also need to be able to demonstrate the ability to accurately assess their performance to further direct their learning. Effective problem solving and judgment are necessary to address patient needs, and engage the patient in a safe and efficient manner. Students must have critical appraisal skills in order to build a foundation for evidence-based practice. Students must demonstrate these critical thinking skills in their course work both at the university and in the clinical environment.

### ***Psychomotor/Physical skills***

Students must demonstrate sufficient motor function to safely perform initial and ongoing assessments and interventions on a patient, including collecting data and assessment measures. Students must be able to use common diagnostic aids or instruments either directly or in an adaptive form (*e.g.*, sphygmomanometer, stethoscope, goniometer) and provide the necessary physical guidance for exercise and/or functional movement by instruction or demonstration. Students must be able to execute motor movements reasonably required to ensure patient safety and treatment effectiveness, either through the students' own

movement or through their ability to guide or direct the movement of others. Sample situations that require such movement include positioning patients in bed; balance, gait or transfer training; mobilization techniques; therapeutic exercise; or maneuvering in confined spaces. In addition, students are expected to physically be able to participate in all learning experiences of the educational program (*e.g.*, for clinical skills laboratory work) and therefore should be able to sit, bend, reach and/or walk or stand for most of the day.

### ***Emotional Health***

Students must consistently demonstrate the emotional health required for full utilization of their intellectual abilities, in the context of the physical, emotional, and mental demands of the program. Students must demonstrate adaptability to changing environments and the ability to function effectively under stress. The development of mature, sensitive and effective relationships with patients, families and other members of the health care team is also required. Students must consistently demonstrate the emotional resilience and balance to manage a myriad of emotionally charged or ethically challenging scenarios that frequently arise in all work settings.

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