



Canadian  
Physiotherapy  
Association

Association  
canadienne de  
physiothérapie

## Position Statement

# Clinical Education of Physiotherapy Students

Clinical education is a critical component of physiotherapy education programs and is essential to the future provision of quality physiotherapy health care to Canadians. Physiotherapists perform a vital role in clinical education by sharing their professional and clinical expertise and knowledge with physiotherapy students. As clinical instructors, they facilitate learning and critical thinking, as well as teach and evaluate students' clinical performance and behaviours. Participating in clinical education also facilitates the recruitment of novice professionals into the workplace.

All members of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) share the responsibility of contributing to the clinical education of physiotherapy students.<sup>1</sup> CPA supports and promotes collaboration on the exploration and development of flexible models for clinical education of physiotherapy students among all stakeholders.

## BACKGROUND

While the primary responsibility for clinical education within the profession involves mentorship by clinical physiotherapists and the clinical facilities, other educational opportunities in areas such as interprofessional collaboration, primary health care, leadership, research, advocacy and consultation are valued. Such opportunities may be present in clinical facilities or other sites such as community agencies, government departments, professional associations, school boards, and industry. Support for clinical education is a responsibility shared by physiotherapy academic programs, professional associations physiotherapy regulatory bodies, and academic and physiotherapy service accrediting agencies. External stakeholders also have roles in the provision of clinical education for physiotherapy students. These stakeholders include the governments who must ensure the needed supply of health professionals for an aging population, clinical facilities in both the public and private sectors and members of the public.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> CPA Code of Ethics, Responsibilities to the Profession, Item 3.6: "Physiotherapists shall be willing and diligent preceptors in the education of physiotherapy students", June 1989.

<sup>2</sup> While CPA encourages physiotherapy clients to support student learning when requested, their decision will be respected at all times by the supervising physiotherapist and will not affect their professional care in any way.

Clinical education offers clinicians and participating facilities many benefits including:

- Access to current information on new evidence, practice and theory
- Participation in inter-professional learning opportunities
- The potential for recruiting new staff from students who are familiar with facilities in both public and private settings
- Affiliation with universities and access to additional resources for continuing professional development and collaborative research
- Increased physiotherapist productivity<sup>3</sup>

As the range of professional roles and practice expands within the evolving health care environment there will be additional possibilities for clinical education. This will provide opportunities for new and innovative opportunities and partnerships for clinical education, including development of alternate or flexible models for student supervision. Support for clinical instructors from facilities and other stakeholders should include provision of training and formal acknowledgement of their professional contribution by all stakeholder groups.

CPA recognizes that there are factors that affect clinical instructors' ability to manage the responsibility of student clinical instruction. Some of these factors are:

***Human resources*** – The dynamic nature of physiotherapy employment and physiotherapist shortages in many areas of Canada as well as contract, temporary, or part-time arrangements make coordinating with student schedules and needs more challenging. Currently, Canadian physiotherapy programs require over 4600 clinical placements per calendar year<sup>4</sup>, excluding out-of-province or international placements. These numbers will increase as programs increase enrolment.

***Changing practice environment*** – The move to primary health care models of service delivery with collaborative inter-professional teams and advanced practice and other emerging roles for physiotherapists. In addition the complexity of patients' conditions and their needs, the reduction of resources with which to deliver quality care and the changing delivery models have contributed to increasing wait lists and compounded demands on clinicians' practice.

***Organizational support*** - Administrative support for clinical education in both public and private facilities is essential, including the awareness that benefits can out-weigh cost and time involved. Administrators, managers and clinic owners need to support and acknowledge the importance of clinical instructors to the physiotherapy profession.

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<sup>3</sup> Schoen DL, Tomaka JW, Chriss CE, Gutierrez CP, Hairston JM. The Effect of Student Clinical Experiences on Clinician Productivity. *Journal of Allied Health* 2003;32(4):261-5(5).

<sup>4</sup> Results of an informal CPA survey of the physiotherapy Academic Coordinators of Clinical Education in Canada conducted in October 2008.

## **THE ROLE OF PHYSIOTHERAPISTS IN PROVIDING CLINICAL EDUCATION**

Clinical education enables physiotherapy students to acquire information, skills and competencies necessary for clinical practice, and to gain confidence in their clinical reasoning and application of theoretical knowledge. Clinical instructors are role models who demonstrate and teach best practices and who act as mentors for students as they progress from novice to entry-level physiotherapist.

Many physiotherapists show their commitment to the future of the profession by regularly sharing their expertise and time with physiotherapy students in their role as mentors and clinical instructors.

## **SUMMARY**

Clinical education provides students with opportunities to integrate the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for practice and leads to the development of entry-level physiotherapists who act with professionalism, competence and leadership. CPA encourages all physiotherapists to contribute to this vital process for ensuring the delivery of high quality physiotherapy to Canadians now and in the future.

**THIS POSITION STATEMENT REPLACES CLINICAL EDUCATION OF PHYSIOTHERAPY STUDENTS - DECEMBER 2005**

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