

Looking into the proverbial mirror:
Self-assessment using physiotherapy core professional values

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As self-regulating professionals, physiotherapists (PTs) must regularly engage in continuing professional development (CPD). For many, this involves making time to look into the proverbial 'mirror' to reflect. Reflection and self-assessment are strategies that can assist clinicians in conceptualizing areas that require action and growth, leading to the creation of learning plans that address these identified gaps and guide ongoing CPD.¹ Reflection is an intentional process where one can critically analyze knowledge gaps to improve professional practice.² Reflection upon a recent clinical encounter, a discussion with a peer, or the results of an evaluation can lead to identifying areas in one's professional competence that require attention. Self-assessment is a process whereby one judges their skills, knowledge, or understanding in a particular domain.³ Self-assessment can be a launching point for reflective learning; it occurs when one thinks critically about an event and identifies the corresponding actions.⁴ One way to facilitate self-assessment can be through using a self-assessment tool. Using such a tool can assist in identifying knowledge and skills; guiding reflections upon strengths; setting realistic expectations for professional growth; developing achievable learning goals, and directing the selection of appropriate CPD activities.³ This article will briefly discuss the Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) members' core professional values (CPVs) and introduce the new Self-Assessment Tool to help practicing and student PTs and physiotherapist assistants (PTAs) consider how they embody those values in daily practice. This article will also discuss the role of self-assessment and external feedback in ongoing CPD activities and highlight some relevant resources.

What is a CPV? According to Davis, it is "an operational belief that one accepts as one's own and determines behaviour".⁵ Core values can influence the behaviour of both individuals and groups,⁶ such as a community of individuals belonging to a specific profession or discipline, i.e., members of the CPA. A deep understanding of professional values is vital for healthcare providers since CPVs direct decision-making, problem-solving, and professional conduct.⁷ In clinical practice, understanding one's professional values allows one to recognize when those values may or may not align with a patient's core values.⁸ Recognizing variances can drive changes in clinical interventions in order to deliver inclusive therapeutic interventions that consider patients' values.⁸ Furthermore, when Canadian PTs and PTAs appreciate and demonstrate shared values, it strengthens our professional identity, including in the context of interprofessional activities.⁶

The identification of CPVs for the Canadian physiotherapy profession took place over several years. It involved extensive consultation with more than 1000 practicing and student PTs and PTAs and retirees through the CPA member network. The project began in 2016 with a scoping review and survey.⁹ This project was declared a CPA

charter project in 2017, and afterwards, a series of three online Delphi surveys were conducted with CPA members. Further consultation involved CPA leaders and a range of health literacy, social science, and health justice experts.¹⁰ The list of 10 CPVs, and examples of associated behaviours for each value, was published in 2020 on the CPA website.¹⁰ The CPVs for Canadian PTs are accountability, advocacy, altruism, client-centredness, compassion, equity, excellence, integrity, respect, and social responsibility.¹⁰ See Figure 1. Now that these CPVs have been identified through a robust process, PTs should hold themselves accountable to appreciate and recognize these values, assess whether they embody these in their daily professional activities, and seek out necessary resources to increase their understanding and integration of these CPVs into their practice.

The new CPVs Self-Assessment Tool has been developed to familiarize practicing and student PTs and PTAs with the 10 CPVs. It helps them consider how and when they embody these values in clinical practice. The Self-Assessment Tool provides definitions for each value along with examples of behaviours which can demonstrate the value. For example, engaging in reflective behaviour can demonstrate integrity. For every associated behaviour noted for each of the 10 CPVs, the user answers the question about the frequency they exhibit the described behaviour using a three-point categorical scale (i.e., “I never do this,” “I do this sometimes,” and “I always do this”). This tool can be used as a starting point for any practicing or student PT or PTA wanting to improve their understanding of the set of CPVs and to recognize where they can embody these values in daily practice. While PTs often think about advancing hands-on skills through CPD, it is equally relevant and valuable to focus on interpersonal skills development (i.e., increasing one’s understanding of how to demonstrate empathy, equity, and client centredness).

There is value in completing a self-assessment tool. For example, McGinnis and colleagues conducted a study with 20 American physical therapists from a wide range of practice settings to gain insight into the integration of the American core values into physical therapy practice using the Core Values Self-Assessment (CVSA) tool.¹¹ Physical therapists indicated that the development of their professional core values was built upon the foundation of their values and was enhanced through clinical experiences with positive mentors and role models.¹¹ Additionally, all participants demonstrated incorporating core values into their practice regardless of the varying practice settings and roles the participants represented.¹¹ The results of this study indicate that the CVSA tool contributed to PTs’ understanding of growth opportunities and prompted reflection regarding implementing core values into their practice.¹¹ The authors recommend periodically using tools such as the CVSA to form the foundation for a robust reflective practice.¹¹ As Canadian PTs and PTAs use the CPV Self-Assessment Tool, they can consider, “Do I know the meaning of all 10 CPVs?, How do they apply to my practice? How often do I demonstrate this specific behaviour that indicates I incorporate this value in my work?” The results of using this tool, coupled with reflection, can help users

identify a learning plan to better understand and incorporate the 10 CPVs in their professional practice.

Since there are limitations to any self-assessment process, it is critical that we also seek feedback from peers and mentors to inform the identification of relevant learning goals and professional development activities.¹² The Johari Window can guide feedback conversations with a peer or mentor when incorporating the results of one's self-assessment and reflection.¹³ The Johari Window is a framework of interpersonal communication that describes four discrete "windows" that relate to our knowledge of ourselves and what others know about us.¹³ Ramani and colleagues provide ways to optimize feedback and learning in each of the four windows.¹³ For example, in the "blind" window where the learner does not see a quality or weakness in themselves, but it is evident to another, it is essential to have created a learning environment where constructive and non-judgemental feedback is welcomed so that you can increase your self-awareness and increase the information in your "open" window.¹³ For example, if one was to discuss the results of the CPV Self-Assessment Tool with a professional colleague, they may learn that the colleague had observed them demonstrating behaviour that embodied a specific value when perhaps they did not recognize this in themselves. Supplementing the results of a self-assessment tool with feedback from others is one way to enhance the accuracy of the information on which you design your subsequent learning plan.⁸

What other learning activities can help build an understanding of CPVs? Exposure to role models, direct teaching, and case studies have all been shown to help health professionals learn more about their professional values.¹⁴ In the study by McGinnis and colleagues, where physical therapists discussed how they adopted the core professional values, results indicated that a novice clinician is more likely to accomplish a learning goal related to the CPVs with the guidance of a clinical mentor or educational materials.¹² In contrast, a more practiced clinician would be more likely to accomplish one with the assistance of a mentee.¹¹ Furthermore, Hayward and colleagues conducted a study where a range of learning activities (i.e., case studies, online and in-person dialogue with peers and a clinical instructor about the case, interaction with a simulated patient that matched the case study, and personal reflection) were shown to increase student physical therapists' awareness of the CPVs and develop greater confidence in entering the workforce.¹⁵ The results of this study indicate that a range of learning activities and seeking feedback from various sources is valuable in increasing PTs' awareness of the CPVs.¹⁵

In addition to the CPV Self-Assessment Tool discussed above, one can use a range of valuable openly accessible resources to develop and meet one's learning goals. We conducted a general environmental scan of Canadian regulatory colleges' open-access English web-based content to identify available learning resources and tools. Templates and guides to assist in self-assessment and reflective learning, including resources related to SMART goals, learning goals, learning plans, and reflective journals, among others, are readily available. For example, the Nova Scotia College of PTs and the College of PTs of Ontario (CPO) offer self-assessment tools

such as a self-assessment journal and the annual Professional Issues Self-Assessment (PISA), respectively.^{16,17} The Saskatchewan College of PTs offers a fillable reflective learning form. The Prince Edward Island College of Physiotherapy (PEI-CPT) offers a guide for PTs to create personal learning journals.^{18, 19} Helpful tools for the development of learning plans can be found in the CPO and Newfoundland and Labrador College of PTs websites.^{20, 21} Finally, goal-setting resources can be found on the CPO and PEI-CPT websites.^{22, 23} These are just some of the resources available to PTs from Canadian professional regulatory bodies which are an immense asset to professional growth and development.

Identifying the CPA's CPVs was the first step in creating a set of core values that PTs acknowledge as their own. PTs must fully grasp the 10 CPVs to unite as a professional body on a common ground of guiding principles, whether practicing independently or as part of an interdisciplinary team. Beyond the vital role these CPVs play in our practice, they are integral to our professional activities and should guide our decisions as a professional association. The CPV Self-Assessment Tool allows users to gain additional insight into how they integrate the CPA's CPVs into their professional practice. The results of the Self-Assessment Tool can drive a reflective process to advance one's professional competence. In addition to self-assessment, seeking additional feedback from colleagues or through other strategies is recommended to enhance awareness of potential gaps or areas for development. A wide range of open-access resources on regulatory organizations' websites can assist users in reflecting on, developing, and implementing their learning activities as part of their professional development activities. Since CPVs direct our daily practice and the decisions we make,³ we encourage all practicing and student PTs and PTAs to look into the proverbial 'mirror' with the intent to evaluate, reflect, learn, and grow.

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Figure 1 –

