



# ELP Pre-Admission Observation Hours Task Force Report

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# ELP Pre-Admission Observation Hours Task Force Report

October 3, 2021

## Overview

The National Consortium of Clinical Educators (NCCE) charged the Pre-Admission Observation Hours (ObHr) Task Force (TF) to investigate the current landscape surrounding pre-admission ObHr in Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) education. An objective of the pre-admission TF was to “develop recommendations for future practices regarding required and/or recommended pre-admission ObHr, including proposing possible alternative strategies to meet the needs of DPT Programs, Clinical Sites, Clinicians, and Students.”<sup>a</sup> The final TF report (2020), endorsed by the NCCE and ACAPT, included a proposal of six recommendations that be developed and supported by multiple physical therapy education stakeholders, including the APTA, PTCAS, ACAPT, the Academy, and ELP. As such, this TF convened to execute the recommendations.

## Purpose

The ELP Pre-admission ObHr TF was charged to review the Pre-admission ObHr TF report recommendations and develop resources as they relate to each respective recommendation.

## Objectives

The ELP TF on Pre-admission ObHr prioritized the recommendations and development of resources, with the following objectives:

1. Develop a standard training module required for Observers to access, review and comply prior to their ObHr.
2. Develop a standard training module for clinical supervisors of Observers.
3. Determine a method to encourage Admissions Committees to be explicit on how they utilize the criteria of ObHr (especially "recommended" hours), so that applicants can use this information in making decisions regarding the use of their time and that of the clinical sites.
4. Develop standardized documentation to capture ObHr that can be used by all DPT programs and Observers.
5. Propose recommendations of alternative experiences outside of traditional ObHr, that academic programs can consider, that may demonstrate a prospective student has explored and understands the physical therapy profession.
6. Consider development of a roster of clinical sites that Observers can access when determining clinical sites that will allow for student observation.

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<sup>a</sup> Gleeson P, Bayliss J, Hoang H, Watkins M, Shack J, et al. December 2020. Pre-Admissions observation hours task force final report. Academic Council of American Physical Therapy National Consortium of Clinical Educators. Available at: [https://acapt.org/docs/default-source/consortium-\(ncce\)/acapt-ncce-pre-admission-ob-hr-report-revised-3-recommendation-final-12-10-20.pdf?sfvrsn=5f5982d8\\_0](https://acapt.org/docs/default-source/consortium-(ncce)/acapt-ncce-pre-admission-ob-hr-report-revised-3-recommendation-final-12-10-20.pdf?sfvrsn=5f5982d8_0).

## Process

### Task Force Organization

An NCCE Representative (JB), who was a member of the Pre-Admission ObHr TF, chaired the ELP Pre-Admission ObHr TF. Task Force member selection was strategic to include diversity of stakeholders.

- ACAPT Executive Director
- APTA Academy of Acute Care Representative
- APTA Academy of Education Representative
- Dean
- Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) Academic Program representative
- Physical Therapy Centralized Application Service (PTCAS) representative
- Physical Therapist Residency Program Director

### Distribution of TF Duties

The TF members initially considered prioritizing the development of the six recommendations. Task Force members, in pairs, were assigned and addressed one of six recommendations concurrently. Consensus was reached between pairs and among the TF members after multiple discussions on all six recommendations. The TF members made a unanimous decision to defer Objective/Recommendation #6 (Consider development of a roster of clinical sites that Observers can access when determining sites that will allow for student observation.) as this is unrealistic at the national level considering the mere quantity of clinical sites and variability in processes/procedures regarding ObHr.

## Report Format

- Task Force Structure and Members
- Summary of Resources Developed
- Recommendations for Consideration
- Appendices

### Task Force Structure and Members

#### Chair

- Jamie Bayliss, PT, MPT, DHSc

#### ACAPT Liaison

- Sandy Brooks, ACAPT Executive Director

#### Members

- Ryan Bannister, BA
- Kim Cohee, MS, PT, DPT, OCS
- Mary Dockter, PT, PhD
- Ann Fick, PT, DPT, MS, CCS
- Kathy Giffin, PTA, MS Ed
- Thuha (Ha) Hoang, PT, PhD, MHS
- Bob Rowe, PT, DPT, DMT, MHS, FAAOMPT

## Summary of Resources and Recommendations

The NCCE Pre-Admission ObHr TF<sup>1</sup> proposed six recommendations for consideration following the work in 2020. All six recommendations as well as the directives taken to develop resources are detailed below.

1. **Provide a standard training module required for Observers** to access, review and comply prior to their ObHr. (Appendix I)

A standard training module for Observers was recommended following the work of the Pre-Admission ObHr TF. A standard “training module” may not capture all expectations of the observer’s role considering the variability of clinical site requirements for observers and volunteers across the country. Therefore, *Guidelines for Prospective Student Applicants Requesting Observation Hours* has been developed to define the scope of and common practices within the profession, logistics with obtaining ObHr, and professional behaviors expectations for the Observer when completing ObHr.

Specifically, the *Guidelines for Prospective Student Applicants Requesting Observation Hours* provides a description of ObHr hours as defined in healthcare literature. Themes regarding the benefits of ObHr, as detailed in the NCCE Pre-Admission ObHr TF Report, are included in the guide to emphasize the purpose of ObHr. The content of the guide also includes a description of the scope of PT practice; detailed information and questions that should be considered when inquiring about a DPT program’s ObHr required and/or recommended hours; professionalism and communication strategies to enhance the experience; do’s and don’ts when observing; how to document hours; and meeting/abiding by local, federal, and facility specific requirements/policy.

It is recommended that the *Guidelines for Prospective Student Applicants Requesting Observation Hours* be supported by multiple physical therapy education stakeholders, including the APTA, PTCAS, ACAPT, the Academy, and ELP. Dissemination of this resource on the APTA and PTCAS websites would provide access to prospective students on multiple platforms.

2. **Provide a standard training module for clinical supervisors of Observers.** (Appendix II)

A standard training module for clinical supervisors of Observers was recommended following the work of the Pre-Admission ObHr TF. A standard “training module” that would prepare clinicians to assist students to learning about the depth and breadth of the physical therapy profession, including available certifications/specialist training, challenges and benefits of that particular type of setting or that particular patient population was recommended. A second recommendation for the module was to include other types of clinics or patient populations that are different from the observation site so that the student gains a wider viewpoint.

The current TF noted that this type of resource would complement the development of alternative experiences to traditional ObHr. Therefore, consideration should be given to developing a module that could allow clinicians to earn continuing education units (CEUs) for completion of the training module.

The *Clinical Site Resource: Guidelines for Prospective Student Applicants Requesting Observation Hours* has been developed to inform clinical sites about the guidelines that

Observers are provided when seeking ObHr. Additionally, strategies for engaging an Observer and role-modelling what it is like in the day of a PT are detailed in this guide.

It is recommended that the *Clinical Site Resource: Guidelines for Prospective Student Applicants Requesting Observation Hours* be supported by multiple physical therapy education stakeholders, including the APTA, PTCAS, ACAPT, the Academy, and ELP. Dissemination of this resource on the APTA and PTCAS websites would provide access to prospective students on multiple platforms.

3. **Admissions Committees should be explicit on how they utilize the criteria of ObHr (especially "recommended" hours), so that applicants can use this information in making decisions regarding the use of their time and that of the clinical sites.** (Appendix III)

Motion AC-6 -21 Clarity of Observation Hours in the Admission Process has been developed and will be presented for consideration and vote at the ACAPT business meeting at the Educational Leadership Conference 2021. Based on feedback from the ACAPT Town Halls Virtual Motion Discussion Forums, the Task Force is revising the motion's language in collaboration with original pre-admission ObHr task force members and the reference committee. General recommendations from the original task force include: discontinuing the practice of listing "recommended" to "required" ObHr and the need for admissions committees to be explicit on how they utilize the criteria of Pre-admission observation hours (ObHr) so that applicants can use this information in making decisions regarding the use of their time and that of the clinical sites.

4. **To increase efficiency and lower paperwork burden for prospective students as well as clinicians, consider having standardized documentation to capture ObHr that can be used by all DPT programs.** (Appendix IV)

The Physical Therapy Centralized Application Service (PTCAS) currently utilizes two methods for applicant reporting of volunteer experiences and ObHr: PTCAS Directory – Observation Hours Section and PTCAS Application – Observation Hours Section. The proposed changes to both sections within PTCAS have been made for next year's admissions cycle (Appendix IV). Since PTACAS shares a webform with PTCAS, the same changes have been made to the application content. For the PTCAS Directory, however, those changes are only be relevant to PTCAS as PTACAS does not yet have a comparable Directory. Once more programs participate in PTACAS, the staff from APTA will consider developing a similar Directory which would model the one for PTCAS.

The information captured in the PTCAS application – Observation Hours Section will also be available for prospective students who are applying to academic programs that do not utilize PTCAS. Therefore, it is recommended that the documentation forms be supported by multiple physical therapy education stakeholders, including the APTA, PTCAS, ACAPT, the Academy, and ELP. Dissemination of this resource on the APTA and PTCAS websites would provide access to prospective students on multiple platforms.

5. **Programs may consider accepting alternative experiences outside of formal ObHr that demonstrate an applicant has explored and understands the PT profession.** (Appendix V)

Alternative experiences outside of formal ObHr was investigated. The alternative experiences that are recommended by the current TF would allow prospective students to understand the depth and breadth of the PT profession, including settings, patient populations, benefits and challenges of each, as well as the role of various interprofessional team members. An additional goal of the alternative experiences is to foster opportunities for prospective students to assess whether the PT profession is a good “fit” for the applicant.

The proposal for alternative experiences includes guiding principles, recommendations for activities/experiences, plans for a learning center alternate PT experience pathway, and the project management logistics for developing such resources. It is recommended that the proposal for alternative experiences be supported by multiple physical therapy education stakeholders, including the APTA, PTCAS, ACAPT, the Academy, and ELP. As such all stakeholders would need to work collaboratively to discuss the best next steps for the development of the proposed alternative experiences. Consideration for a new task force or committee should be given to investigate funding, online platform use, and specific logistics for bringing the recommended alternative experiences to fruition.

**6. Students and clinicians expressed a need for having a roster of clinical sites that accept Observers.**

Creation of a roster of clinical sites that accept Observers is unrealistic at the national level considering the mere quantity of clinical sites and variability in processes/procedures regarding ObHr. Therefore, considerations should be given to investigating local or regional mechanisms for the development and dissemination of this information to various stakeholders.

## Appendices

- I. Applicant Guide for Observation Hours pp 6-12
- II. Site Guide for Observation Hours pp 13-20
- III. AC-6-21 Clarify on Observation Hours in the Admissions Process pp 21-23
- IV. PTCAS Observation Hours Documentation – Directory and Application pp 24-30
- V. Alternative Experiences pp 31-32



## Guidelines for Prospective Student Applicants Requesting Observation Hours

The professional scope of physical therapy practice is founded in patient and client management. Physical therapists (PT) aim to improve population health and the human experience through “diagnosis and prognosis, to optimize physical function, movement, performance, health, quality of life, and well-being across the lifespan.”<sup>1</sup>(lines14-17) The scope of PT practice also includes “innovation, research, collaboration, and changes in societal needs.”<sup>1</sup>(lines 10-11) Physical therapists practice in a variety of settings such as acute care, inpatient rehabilitation, outpatient orthopedics, pediatrics, skilled nursing facilities, etc. and work with a diverse patient population.

Physical therapist assistants (PTA) assist PTs in provision of care under the direction and supervision of a licensed PT.<sup>2</sup> It is within the scope of a PTA to implement components of care, obtain and document data related to intervention, and communicate/collaborate with the PT to modify a patient’s plan of care.<sup>2</sup> As such, physical therapy stakeholders encourage prospective students to be informed before deciding to become a PT.

Observation hours (ObHr), also referred to as volunteer hours, shadowing, or paid hours,<sup>3</sup> as required or recommended by several physical therapy (DPT and PTA) programs, are reported to offer prospective physical therapist (PT) students several benefits. Such benefits include the opportunity to: increase their knowledge about the profession of physical therapy<sup>4,5</sup>; “gain a thorough understanding and appreciation for depth and breadth of the settings, patient populations, tasks, obligations and responsibilities of the physical therapist”<sup>3</sup>(p11); and “assess whether the profession is an appropriate fit for them, given the time and financial resources required”<sup>3</sup>(p11).

Prospective students often have questions related to the ObHr process, such as the number of required/recommended hours for academic programs; type of settings; how to obtain hours; how to keep a record of hours; etc. Although information regarding ObHr for most academic programs can be found on their respective website, as well as the Physical Therapy Centralized Application Service (PTCAS and PTACAS) for participating programs, this resource will provide guidance on additional considerations regarding ObHr.

<i>Observation Hour FAQs</i>
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- |  |
|--|
| 1. What is the difference between shadowing and volunteer hours? |
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Volunteering is a hands-on and unpaid delivery of an individual's time and services.<sup>6</sup> Volunteer hours are more formally arranged and normally scheduled through a volunteering office at a hospital or clinic. Individuals are required to fill out paperwork and go through a specific orientation process.</li> <li>b. Shadowing may be a less formalized process depending on the facility, however, clinical facilities may require paperwork or screening ahead of scheduled experiences. It is essential to inquire about pre-shadowing requirements. Shadowing differs from volunteer hours in that they are a concentrated type of observation of a healthcare professional; typically, a physical therapist. Individuals observe the healthcare professional provide care to patients or clients in a clinical setting, such as a hospital, clinic, assisted living/care facility, private practice, etc. Through clinical observation/shadowing experiences, individuals see what the day-to-day responsibilities of a given health career might involve within that respective healthcare setting.</li> </ul>
<p>2. What does a prospective student need to know about the required/recommended observation hours for each academic program where they choose to apply?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Number of required hours</li> <li>b. Number of recommended hours</li> <li>c. Number of settings (e.g. one, two, any)</li> <li>d. Type of settings (e.g. outpatient, inpatient, specialty)</li> <li>e. Are paid and unpaid hours accepted? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Paid hours are accepted by several DPT programs. These hours are obtained through paid positions such as a rehabilitation technician/aide, athletic trainer, etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>f. How much time can lapse between completion of observation hours and application submission?</li> </ul>
<p>3. How are the observation hours used in the application process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Recommend seeking clarification about the use of observation hours throughout an academic program's admissions process (i.e. advancement to an interview, points toward an admissions ranking, to enhance responses during an interview, etc.).</li> </ul>
<p>4. Who should the prospective student observe in order for the observation hours to meet academic program requirements?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Prospective physical therapist students - Licensed physical therapist</li> <li>b. Prospective physical therapist assistant students - Licensed physical therapist or physical therapist assistant</li> </ul>
<p>5. Who must verify the completed observation hours?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Prospective physical therapist students - Licensed physical therapist (unless otherwise indicated by the academic program)</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. Prospective physical therapist assistant students - Licensed physical therapist or physical therapist assistant</li> </ul>
<p>6. Will volunteer experience(s), such as hours at a camp, food pantry, older adult facility, special Olympics, etc. meet the requirements for observation hours?</p>
<p>7. Who does the prospective student contact at a clinical site/healthcare facility to arrange observation hours and/or volunteer hours?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Prior to contacting a facility, review the organization's website for guidance.</li> <li>b. Healthcare systems and clinical facilities arrange/schedule observation hours through different offices and/or individuals, including, but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Volunteer services</li> <li>ii. Clinic owner</li> <li>iii. Clinic manager</li> <li>iv. Site Coordinator for Clinical Education</li> <li>v. Staff liaison</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>8. Communication Tips</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Phone conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Introduce oneself using first and last name</li> <li>ii. Indicate the reason for the call</li> <li>iii. Ask to speak to the individual who arranges observation hours</li> <li>iv. Speak clearly, be mindful of volume and use proper language</li> <li>v. Actively listen and take notes</li> <li>vi. Repeat a summary of the information provided to ensure accuracy of what is written it down</li> <li>vii. Thank the individual for their time and indicate when/how to communicate in the future</li> </ul> </li> <li>b. Email etiquette <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Use a professional email address (e.g. <a href="mailto:jacksonsmith@gmail.com">jacksonsmith@gmail.com</a>, <a href="mailto:anna.mueller@mnd.edu">anna.mueller@mnd.edu</a>)</li> <li>ii. Include a clear, direct subject line (e.g. Inquiry into PT Observation Hours)</li> <li>iii. Signature line should include the prospective student's name, undergraduate institution, and contact information (email and phone number)</li> <li>iv. Use professional salutations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Appropriate salutations (e.g. Dear Dr. Duplechan, To Whom it May Concern, Dear Mr. Burgess)</li> <li>2. Inappropriate salutations (e.g. Hi Mike, Hello Mrs. Dixon, no salutation)</li> </ul> </li> <li>v. Use professional terminology and grammar - avoiding slang, inappropriate humor, animated punctuation</li> <li>vi. Use professional font and color</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- vii. Proofread the message prior to sending
- viii. Double check that the correct recipient has been selected and the email address is spelled correctly

### *Preparation for Observation Experiences*

9. Onboarding Requirements: Physical therapy practices and healthcare systems often have onboarding requirements in order to complete observation hours. It is essential to clarify the requirements with the facility's observation hour coordinator and/or human resources/volunteer services.

Requirements may include, but are not limited to:

- a. TB attestation/TB test results within the last 12 months
- b. Background check
- c. Consent and release forms (self, clinician, guardian if under 18 years of age)
- d. Signed confidentiality statement
- e. Copy of government issued photo ID/passport
- f. Evidence of seasonal flu vaccine
- g. Evidence of COVID-19 vaccine

10. Professional attire and appearance - The clinical facility likely has a dress code, which the prospective student should follow. In addition, they should consider the following guidelines:

- a. Volunteers/observers are expected to present themselves in a neat and clean manner. The following guidelines *may* apply:
  - i. Apparel
    - 1. Polo shirt, dress shirt, sweater; T-shirts and sweatshirts are often not permitted.
    - 2. Dress slacks, khakis or Docker-style pants; shorts, jeans, tight fitting slacks, stretch pants, capris, cutoffs or clothes showing a bare midriff are inappropriate.
    - 3. Socks or footies regardless of shoe type should be worn.
    - 4. Tennis shoes or low-heeled close toe shoes; mules or clogs may be permitted, however, sandals or shoes with open toes are not acceptable.
    - 5. All clothes should be clean and neatly pressed.
  - b. Grooming/Appearance
    - i. Hairstyles should be well kept.
    - ii. Mustaches, beards or sideburns should be neat and well-trimmed.
  - c. Jewelry and make-up should be worn in moderation.
  - d. Seek clarification from a clinical site about their policy related to visible tattoos

- and body piercings.
- e. Fragrances should be kept to a minimum due to allergies.

#### 11. First Impressions/Behaviors

- a. Be 10-15 minutes early for every shift/day that one is present
- b. Introduce oneself upon entering the facility; whether to the receptionist/patient service specialist, the clinician, etc.
- c. Let the provider introduce the observer to the patient.
- d. Don't be overbearing or too aggressive; avoid giving the site a reason to not allow an applicant back but rather be willing to provide a good recommendation.
- e. Ask questions; but know when to ask questions.

#### 12. Dos and Don'ts While Observing

- a. Dos
  - i. Gain an appreciation for the professional skills needed for that area of practice: time management, motivation, non-verbals
  - ii. Take note of different communication styles used with patient interaction:
    - 1. Bedside manner, approachability
    - 2. Active listening vs. passive listening
    - 3. Ability of the clinician to educate the patient
  - iii. Take note of the different patient populations seen in a particular setting (age, race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education level, type of diagnosis, etc.)
  - iv. Seek clarification from the supervising therapist about variability in productivity expectations: how many patients are generally seen on an average day in one setting vs. another?
  - v. Be mindful of the physical requirements required in the profession: sitting vs. standing time in different settings
- b. Don't
  - i. Monopolize a conversation with the clinician/patient
  - ii. Interject perspective unless sought by supervising therapist
  - iii. Interject into a conversation with personal experiences unless asked
  - iv. Ask questions about a patient directly in front of the patient and/or other patients
  - v. Don't question what the supervising therapist is doing during patient care

#### 13. What should be documented for proof of observation hours?

- a. Inquire about the preferred method with each academic program (which may be outlined in PTCAS and PTACAS)

14. How should observation hours be documented? Is there a standardized form?

- a. Inquire about the preferred method with each academic program (which may be outlined in PTCAS and PTACAS)
- b. Commonly used documentation includes, but is not limited to:
  - i. applicant's name
  - ii. program for which they are applying
  - iii. facility name, address, phone number, and setting
  - iv. date(s) of observation hours
  - v. hours observed each day (time in and time out plus total)
  - vi. and signature of supervising physical therapist
- c. Documentation may be submitted as a formal letter from the supervising physical therapist on official letterhead
- d. For academic programs that utilize PTCAS/PTACAS, the supervising physical therapist may be emailed a link to verify hours in place of uploading a signed form.

15. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)

To observe physical therapy care, it will be expected by the patients/clients, clinical site, and physical therapist that applicants follow the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) at all times. This federal law protects sensitive health information of all patients/clients from being shared without their consent or knowledge. Therefore, applicants will not be allowed access to their medical records or to participate in their care. And while an applicant is there, they may encounter patients/clients requesting to have privacy versus allowing permission to have others observe their care.

Applicants may be excited to share their experiences or others may be curious how they liked the experience. Before speaking, please note applicants cannot share patient information with friends, family or anyone else. Protected health information includes details such as, but not limited to, name, date of birth, admit date, discharge date, SSN, diagnoses, physical or mental health, provision of health care, contact information, payment for provision of health care and physician notes.

What information can applicants share? After verifying initially, the prospective student should ask the clinical supervisor about their policy. Examples of what a prospective student can share might be observation of how the therapist assisted a patient to improve patients: walking ability, motion in their shoulder, and strength.

## References

1. American Physical Therapy Association. *Physical Therapist's Scope of Practice HOD P06-17-09-16/HOD P06-17-08-07*. Available at: <file:///C:/Users/baylissjamie/Desktop/position-pt-scope-practice.pdf>. Updated September 13, 2017. Accessed September 25, 2021.
2. American Physical Therapy Association. What Physical Therapist Assistants Do. Available at: <https://www.apta.org/your-career/careers-in-physical-therapy/becoming-a-pta> Accessed September 25, 2021.
3. Gleeson P, Bayliss J, Hoang H, Watkins M, Shack J, et al. December 2020. Pre-Admissions observation hours task force final report. Academic Council of American Physical Therapy National Consortium of Clinical Educators. Available at: [https://acapt.org/docs/default-source/consortium-\(ncce\)/acapt-ncce-pre-admission-ob-hr-report-revised-3-recommendation-final-12-10-20.pdf?sfvrsn=5f5982d8\\_0](https://acapt.org/docs/default-source/consortium-(ncce)/acapt-ncce-pre-admission-ob-hr-report-revised-3-recommendation-final-12-10-20.pdf?sfvrsn=5f5982d8_0). Accessed July 13, 2021.
4. Wheeler E, Finucane S, Soper S, Mayhew T. Perceived value of preadmission physical therapy ObHr and their ability to predict academic performance. *J Phys Ther Educ*. 2018;32(1):17-25.
5. Gleeson PB, Utsey C. An examination of observation hours used as an admission criterion for physical therapist programs in Texas. *J Phys Ther Educ*. 2003;17(1):65-73.
6. Medical School Headquarters. Preparing For a Career in Medicine: Clinical Experiences. <https://medicalschoollhq.net/preparing-for-a-career-in-medicine-clinical-experience/>. Accessed July 14, 2021.



## Clinical Site Resource: Guidelines for Prospective Student Applicant Requesting Observation Hours

Observation hours (ObHr), also referred to as volunteer hours, shadowing, or paid hours,<sup>1</sup> as required or recommended by several physical therapy (DPT and PTA) programs, are reported to offer prospective students several benefits. Such benefits include the opportunity to:

- Increase their knowledge about the profession of physical therapy<sup>2,3</sup>
- “Gain a thorough understanding and appreciation for depth and breadth of the settings patient populations, tasks, obligations and responsibilities of the physical therapist”<sup>1(p11)</sup>
- “Assess whether the profession is an appropriate fit for them, given the time and financial resources required”<sup>1(p11)</sup>.

Clinicians who offer ObHr experiences are valued, clinical education stakeholders. Clinicians can provide a realistic description or role-modelling of a “Day in the Life” of a PT or PTA. The Observer can then assess whether the physical therapy profession is a good “fit” for them. Clinicians play a vital role in helping the Observer understand and appreciate of the “depth and breadth of the settings, patient populations, tasks, obligations and responsibilities of the physical therapist.”<sup>1(p11)</sup> To enhance an observation experience, Clinicians should appropriately engage the Observer by discussing the scope of physical therapy related to specific patient presentation while maintaining patient confidentiality.

An *Applicant Guide for Observation Hours* has been developed to assist the clinical site personnel in preparing the Observer for ObHr experiences. Prospective students often have questions about the ObHr process. This might include the number of required/recommended hours for academic programs, type of settings; obtaining hours, keeping a record of hours, etc. Information regarding ObHr for academic programs is found on their respective website and the Physical Therapy Centralized Application Service (PTCAS and PTACAS). The *Applicant Guide for Observation Hours* is a resource for additional considerations regarding ObHr. This guide should not supersede a clinical site’s requirements for observers.

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<sup>1</sup> Gleeson P, Bayliss J, Hoang H, Watkins M, Shack J, et al. December 2020. Pre-Admissions observation hours task force final report. Academic Council of American Physical Therapy National Consortium of Clinical Educators. Available at: [https://acapt.org/docs/default-source/consortium-\(ncce\)/acapt-ncce-pre-admission-ob-hr-report-revised-3-recommendation-final-12-10-20.pdf?sfvrsn=5f5982d8\\_0](https://acapt.org/docs/default-source/consortium-(ncce)/acapt-ncce-pre-admission-ob-hr-report-revised-3-recommendation-final-12-10-20.pdf?sfvrsn=5f5982d8_0). Accessed July 13, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Wheeler E, Finucane S, Soper S, Mayhew T. Perceived value of preadmission physical therapy ObHr and their ability to predict academic performance. *J Phys Ther Educ*. 2018;32(1):17-25

<sup>3</sup> Gleeson PB, Utsey C. An examination of observation hours used as an admission criterion for physical therapist programs in Texas. *J Phys Ther Educ*. 2003;17(1):65-73



## Guidelines for Prospective Student Applicants Requesting Observation Hours

The professional scope of physical therapy practice is founded in patient and client management. Physical therapists (PT) aim to improve population health and the human experience through “diagnosis and prognosis, to optimize physical function, movement, performance, health, quality of life, and well-being across the lifespan.”<sup>1</sup>(lines 14-17) The scope of PT practice also includes “innovation, research, collaboration, and changes in societal needs.”<sup>1</sup>(lines 10-11) Physical therapists practice in a variety of settings such as acute care, inpatient rehabilitation, outpatient orthopedics, pediatrics, skilled nursing facilities, etc. and work with a diverse patient population.

Physical therapist assistants (PTA) assist PTs in provision of care under the direction and supervision of a licensed PT.<sup>2</sup> It is within the scope of a PTA to implement components of care, obtain and document data related to intervention, and communicate/collaborate with the PT to modify a patient’s plan of care.<sup>2</sup> As such, physical therapy stakeholders encourage prospective students to be informed before deciding to become a PT.

Observation hours (ObHr), also referred to as volunteer hours, shadowing, or paid hours,<sup>3</sup> as required or recommended by several physical therapy (DPT and PTA) programs, are reported to offer prospective physical therapist (PT) students several benefits. Such benefits include the opportunity to: increase their knowledge about the profession of physical therapy<sup>4,5</sup>; “gain a thorough understanding and appreciation for depth and breadth of the settings, patient populations, tasks, obligations and responsibilities of the physical therapist”<sup>3</sup>(p11); and “assess whether the profession is an appropriate fit for them, given the time and financial resources required”<sup>3</sup>(p11).

Prospective students often have questions related to the ObHr process, such as the number of required/recommended hours for academic programs; type of settings; how to obtain hours; how to keep a record of hours; etc. Although information regarding ObHr for most academic programs can be found on their respective website, as well as the Physical Therapy Centralized Application Service (PTCAS and PTACAS) for participating programs, this resource will provide guidance on additional considerations regarding ObHr.

*Observation Hour FAQs*

<p>1. What is the difference between shadowing and volunteer hours?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Volunteering is a hands-on and unpaid delivery of an individual's time and services.<sup>6</sup> Volunteer hours are more formally arranged and normally scheduled through a volunteering office at a hospital or clinic. Individuals are required to fill out paperwork and go through a specific orientation process.</li> <li>b. Shadowing may be a less formalized process depending on the facility, however, clinical facilities may require paperwork or screening ahead of scheduled experiences. It is essential to inquire about pre-shadowing requirements. Shadowing differs from volunteer hours in that they are a concentrated type of observation of a healthcare professional; typically, a physical therapist. Individuals observe the healthcare professional provide care to patients or clients in a clinical setting, such as a hospital, clinic, assisted living/care facility, private practice, etc. Through clinical observation/shadowing experiences, individuals see what the day-to-day responsibilities of a given health career might involve within that respective healthcare setting.</li> </ul>
<p>2. What does a prospective student need to know about the required/recommended observation hours for each academic program where they choose to apply?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Number of required hours</li> <li>b. Number of recommended hours</li> <li>c. Number of settings (e.g. one, two, any)</li> <li>d. Type of settings (e.g. outpatient, inpatient, specialty)</li> <li>e. Are paid and unpaid hours accepted? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Paid hours are accepted by several DPT programs. These hours are obtained through paid positions such as a rehabilitation technician/aide, athletic trainer, etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>f. How much time can lapse between completion of observation hours and application submission?</li> </ul>
<p>3. How are the observation hours used in the application process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Recommend seeking clarification about the use of observation hours throughout an academic program's admissions process (i.e. advancement to an interview, points toward an admissions ranking, to enhance responses during an interview, etc.).</li> </ul>
<p>4. Who should the prospective student observe in order for the observation hours to meet academic program requirements?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Prospective physical therapist students - Licensed physical therapist</li> <li>b. Prospective physical therapist assistant students - Licensed physical therapist or physical therapist assistant</li> </ul>
<p>5. Who must verify the completed observation hours?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Prospective physical therapist students - Licensed physical therapist (unless otherwise indicated by the academic program)</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. Prospective physical therapist assistant students - Licensed physical therapist or physical therapist assistant</li> </ul>
<p>6. Will volunteer experience(s), such as hours at a camp, food pantry, older adult facility, special Olympics, etc. meet the requirements for observation hours?</p>
<p>7. Who does the prospective student contact at a clinical site/healthcare facility to arrange observation hours and/or volunteer hours?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Prior to contacting a facility, review the organization's website for guidance.</li> <li>b. Healthcare systems and clinical facilities arrange/schedule observation hours through different offices and/or individuals, including, but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Volunteer services</li> <li>ii. Clinic owner</li> <li>iii. Clinic manager</li> <li>iv. Site Coordinator for Clinical Education</li> <li>v. Staff liaison</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>8. Communication Tips</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Phone conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Introduce oneself using first and last name</li> <li>ii. Indicate the reason for the call</li> <li>iii. Ask to speak to the individual who arranges observation hours</li> <li>iv. Speak clearly, be mindful of volume and use proper language</li> <li>v. Actively listen and take notes</li> <li>vi. Repeat a summary of the information provided to ensure accuracy of what is written it down</li> <li>vii. Thank the individual for their time and indicate when/how to communicate in the future</li> </ul> </li> <li>b. Email etiquette <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Use a professional email address (e.g. <a href="mailto:jacksonsmith@gmail.com">jacksonsmith@gmail.com</a>, <a href="mailto:anna.mueller@mnd.edu">anna.mueller@mnd.edu</a>)</li> <li>ii. Include a clear, direct subject line (e.g. Inquiry into PT Observation Hours)</li> <li>iii. Signature line should include the prospective student's name, undergraduate institution, and contact information (email and phone number)</li> <li>iv. Use professional salutations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Appropriate salutations (e.g. Dear Dr. Duplechan, To Whom it May Concern, Dear Mr. Burgess)</li> <li>2. Inappropriate salutations (e.g. Hi Mike, Hello Mrs. Dixon, no salutation)</li> </ul> </li> <li>v. Use professional terminology and grammar - avoiding slang, inappropriate humor, animated punctuation</li> <li>vi. Use professional font and color</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- vii. Proofread the message prior to sending
- viii. Double check that the correct recipient has been selected and the email address is spelled correctly

### *Preparation for Observation Experiences*

9. Onboarding Requirements: Physical therapy practices and healthcare systems often have onboarding requirements in order to complete observation hours. It is essential to clarify the requirements with the facility's observation hour coordinator and/or human resources/volunteer services.

Requirements may include, but are not limited to:

- a. TB attestation/TB test results within the last 12 months
- b. Background check
- c. Consent and release forms (self, clinician, guardian if under 18 years of age)
- d. Signed confidentiality statement
- e. Copy of government issued photo ID/passport
- f. Evidence of seasonal flu vaccine
- g. Evidence of COVID-19 vaccine

10. Professional attire and appearance - The clinical facility likely has a dress code, which the prospective student should follow. In addition, they should consider the following guidelines:

- a. Volunteers/observers are expected to present themselves in a neat and clean manner. The following guidelines *may* apply:
  - i. Apparel
    - 1. Polo shirt, dress shirt, sweater; T-shirts and sweatshirts are often not permitted.
    - 2. Dress slacks, khakis or Docker-style pants; shorts, jeans, tight fitting slacks, stretch pants, capris, cutoffs or clothes showing a bare midriff are inappropriate.
    - 3. Socks or footies regardless of shoe type should be worn.
    - 4. Tennis shoes or low-heeled close toe shoes; mules or clogs may be permitted, however, sandals or shoes with open toes are not acceptable.
    - 5. All clothes should be clean and neatly pressed.
  - b. Grooming/Appearance
    - i. Hairstyles should be well kept.
    - ii. Mustaches, beards or sideburns should be neat and well-trimmed.
  - c. Jewelry and make-up should be worn in moderation.
  - d. Seek clarification from a clinical site about their policy related to visible tattoos

- and body piercings.
- e. Fragrances should be kept to a minimum due to allergies.

#### 11. First Impressions/Behaviors

- a. Be 10-15 minutes early for every shift/day that one is present
- b. Introduce oneself upon entering the facility; whether to the receptionist/patient service specialist, the clinician, etc.
- c. Let the provider introduce the observer to the patient.
- d. Don't be overbearing or too aggressive; avoid giving the site a reason to not allow an applicant back but rather be willing to provide a good recommendation.
- e. Ask questions; but know when to ask questions.

#### 12. Dos and Don'ts While Observing

- a. Dos
  - i. Gain an appreciation for the professional skills needed for that area of practice: time management, motivation, non-verbals
  - ii. Take note of different communication styles used with patient interaction:
    - 1. Bedside manner, approachability
    - 2. Active listening vs. passive listening
    - 3. Ability of the clinician to educate the patient
  - iii. Take note of the different patient populations seen in a particular setting (age, race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education level, type of diagnosis, etc.)
  - iv. Seek clarification from the supervising therapist about variability in productivity expectations: how many patients are generally seen on an average day in one setting vs. another?
  - v. Be mindful of the physical requirements required in the profession: sitting vs. standing time in different settings
- b. Don't
  - i. Monopolize a conversation with the clinician/patient
  - ii. Interject perspective unless sought by supervising therapist
  - iii. Interject into a conversation with personal experiences unless asked
  - iv. Ask questions about a patient directly in front of the patient and/or other patients
  - v. Don't question what the supervising therapist is doing during patient care

#### 13. What should be documented for proof of observation hours?

- a. Inquire about the preferred method with each academic program (which may be outlined in PTCAS and PTACAS)

14. How should observation hours be documented? Is there a standardized form?

- a. Inquire about the preferred method with each academic program (which may be outlined in PTCAS and PTACAS)
- b. Commonly used documentation includes, but is not limited to:
  - i. applicant's name
  - ii. program for which they are applying
  - iii. facility name, address, phone number, and setting
  - iv. date(s) of observation hours
  - v. hours observed each day (time in and time out plus total)
  - vi. and signature of supervising physical therapist
- c. Documentation may be submitted as a formal letter from the supervising physical therapist on official letterhead
- d. For academic programs that utilize PTCAS/PTACAS, the supervising physical therapist may be emailed a link to verify hours in place of uploading a signed form.

15. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)

To observe physical therapy care, it will be expected by the patients/clients, clinical site, and physical therapist that applicants follow the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) at all times. This federal law protects sensitive health information of all patients/clients from being shared without their consent or knowledge. Therefore, applicants will not be allowed access to their medical records or to participate in their care. And while an applicant is there, they may encounter patients/clients requesting to have privacy versus allowing permission to have others observe their care.

Applicants may be excited to share their experiences or others may be curious how they liked the experience. Before speaking, please note applicants cannot share patient information with friends, family or anyone else. Protected health information includes details such as, but not limited to, name, date of birth, admit date, discharge date, SSN, diagnoses, physical or mental health, provision of health care, contact information, payment for provision of health care and physician notes.

What information can applicants share? After verifying initially, the prospective student should ask the clinical supervisor about their policy. Examples of what a prospective student can share might be observation of how the therapist assisted a patient to improve patients: walking ability, motion in their shoulder, and strength.

## References

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4. Wheeler E, Finucane S, Soper S, Mayhew T. Perceived value of preadmission physical therapy ObHr and their ability to predict academic performance. *J Phys Ther Educ*. 2018;32(1):17-25.
5. Gleeson PB, Utsey C. An examination of observation hours used as an admission criterion for physical therapist programs in Texas. *J Phys Ther Educ*. 2003;17(1):65-73.
6. Medical School Headquarters. Preparing For a Career in Medicine: Clinical Experiences. <https://medicalschoollhq.net/preparing-for-a-career-in-medicine-clinical-experience/>. Accessed July 14, 2021.



## AMERICAN COUNCIL OF ACADEMIC PHYSICAL THERAPY

### 1 AC-6

2 Motion Maker Name: Mary Dockter, University of Mary  
3 Motion Maker Phone: 701-355-8045  
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5  
6 Reference Committee Liaison Name: Lynn Rivers, D'Youville College  
7 Reference Committee Liaison Phone: 716-698-0991  
8 Reference Committee Liaison Email: riversl@dyc.edu

9  
10 **PROPOSED BY:** Mary Dockter, University of Mary

11  
12  
13 **TITLE:** Clarity of Observation Hours in the Admission Process

14  
15 **Move that the following policy be adopted:**

- 16  
17 1. Admissions committees shall discontinue the practice of listing "Recommended" ObHr  
18 supplemental to "Required" ObHr.  
19 2. Admissions Committees shall be explicit on how they utilize the criteria of Pre-admission  
20 observation hours (ObHr) so that applicants can use this information in making decisions  
21 regarding the use of their time and that of the clinical sites.

#### 22 23 **Support Statement:**

24 ACAPT's National Consortium of Clinical Educators (NCCE) identified concerns from the clinical  
25 education community that pre-admission Observation Hours (ObHrs) created challenges for DPT  
26 student clinical placements. The ACAPT board empowered the NCCE to create a task force to  
27 investigate the landscape surrounding pre-admission observation hours in DPT education. The task  
28 force created and sent out a comprehensive survey and received the following participant response:  
29 admissions committee members (n= 162), clinicians (n=2937), PT students and recent graduates  
30 (n=1222), and DCEs (n=150). Survey analysis revealed that, among several findings, there is wide  
31 variability in ObHr requirements (number of hours (required and/or recommended) number and  
32 type of settings paid vs unpaid) and how the hours are weighted/used in the admission's process.  
33 The final report can be accessed here:  
34 [https://acapt.org/docs/default-source/consortium-\(ncce\)/acapt-ncce-pre-admission-ob-hr-report-revised-3-](https://acapt.org/docs/default-source/consortium-(ncce)/acapt-ncce-pre-admission-ob-hr-report-revised-3-recommendation-final-12-10-20.pdf?sfvrsn=5f5982d8_0)  
35 [recommendation-final-12-10-20.pdf?sfvrsn=5f5982d8\\_0](https://acapt.org/docs/default-source/consortium-(ncce)/acapt-ncce-pre-admission-ob-hr-report-revised-3-recommendation-final-12-10-20.pdf?sfvrsn=5f5982d8_0).

36  
37 Specific feedback from the survey revealed:

#### 38 39 Admissions Committee Perspectives

- 40 1. Admissions committee members value ObHr as a means for applicants to demonstrate they have a  
41 basic understanding/knowledge of the PT profession before committing to the rigorous process of  
42 attaining a physical therapy degree.  
43 2. Admissions committee members prefer applicants to have a variety of observation sites (two or  
44 more sites/settings) but acknowledge difficulties that applicants may experience in obtaining hours  
45 in specific settings such as acute care or inpatient rehabilitation.



## AMERICAN COUNCIL OF ACADEMIC PHYSICAL THERAPY

3. Usage and purpose of the ObHr requirement varies among programs: some programs weigh the number of ObHr completed while others utilize them to show the applicant has met this criterion and should advance in the admissions process.

### Clinician Perspectives:

1. The variety of the settings and patient populations in which the ObHr take place is more important than the number; the above purposes can be accomplished with fewer hours than is currently required and/or recommended.
2. The ObHr requirement may be a burden to those students who: a) do not have “contacts” to find facilities that will accept them, b) have work/school/family responsibilities that limit their ability to pursue these hours, and c) financial constraints (time off work, transportation) that limit their ability to pursue these hours. The consequences MAY be that the applicant pool is limited in its diversity for these reasons.
3. Alternative methods of accomplishing the above two purposes should be investigated in light of HIPAA, Covid and other challenges related to having observers in the health care facilities; however, there is no perfect alternative to in person ObHr in the clinic

### Student Perspectives:

1. Students perceive completing a high number of ObHr is of value for increasing the competitiveness of their application.
2. Scheduling time to complete the required or recommended numbers of ObHr can be challenging due to school/sport/work commitments (time).
3. Obtaining hours in hospital/acute/inpatient settings is particularly difficult due to many factors, including in part: lack of nearby facilities willing to accept observers; onboarding requirements; observation hour limits; volunteer hour requirements; overall number of volunteer limits.
4. Balancing the need to complete high numbers of ObHr with the need to work to help pay for school (financial), is challenging; observation hour requirements may discriminate against those of lower socioeconomic status and decrease profession diversity.
5. Finding diverse observation hour settings (access) that are nearby can be challenging, particularly for applicants in rural areas.
6. Determining which facilities accept observers is time consuming, and can be especially difficult for those with limited contacts or little knowledge of physical therapy settings.

After analysis of the data, the NCCE task force identified various priority items including clarity in the use of ObHrs in order to decrease variance in utilization of ObHrs and to create more uniformity in utilization by admissions committees, decrease burden on clinical sites and clinicians, and subsequently, decrease burden on applicants.

The ACAPT board brought forth the final report to the Education Leadership Partnership (ELP) for action on the identified priority items and subsequently created a task force comprised of representatives from APTA, ACAPT, and the NCCE. Robert Rowe, rep from the APTA board, and Mary Dockter, rep from ACAPT, were commissioned to create this motion.

### **CURRENT POSITION/STANDARD/GUIDELINE/POLICY/PROCEDURE:**



AMERICAN COUNCIL OF  
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**RELATED POSITION/STANDARD/GUIDELINE/POLICY/PROCEDURE:**



### PTCAS Directory – PT Observation Hours Section

**NOTE:** An \* denotes that a question or field is required to be completed by the program. Items in RED are additions/changes from the current form.

#### PT Observation Hours

**\*Please select the option that best describes your admission requirements for paid or volunteer PT experiences:**

- ☐ PT Hours are required – no verification of hours is required
- ☐ PT Hours are required – a licensed Physical Therapist (PT) must verify hours w/signed form uploaded or online via PTCAS
- ☐ PT Hours are required – a licensed Physical Therapist (PT) or licensed Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) must verify hours w/signed form uploaded or online via PTCAS
- ☐ PT Hours are not required, but are highly recommended
- ☐ PT Hours are not required, but are considered
- ☐ PT Hours are not required or considered
- ☐ Other

**Total number of PT Observation Hours REQUIRED (enter 0 if none):**

**Total number of PT Observation Hours RECOMMENDED (if applicable):**

**Program deadline for completion of all PT Observation Hours for the next entering class (if applicable):**

Click or tap to enter a date.

**\*Explain how PT Observation Hours are used in your program's application review process (e.g. weighting of hours, impact of exceeding required number of hours, impact of experiences beyond required settings, etc.)**

**Enter any other information about your PT requirements (optional):**

**NOTE:** For the tables in each section below, programs would be required to select either 'Required', 'Accepted/Considered', or 'Not Accepted' for each entry, and can opt to, but will not be required to provide a minimum number of required hours or maximum number of accepted hours for each.

PT Experience: Acceptable Individuals to Observe (NEW)

	Required	Minimum Required Hours	Accepted/ Considered	Maximum Accepted Hours	Not Accepted
Physical Therapist (PT)*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA)*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PT Experience: Type (NEW)

	Required	Minimum Required Hours	Accepted/ Considered	Maximum Accepted Hours	Not Accepted
In Person*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Virtual/Telehealth*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hybrid In- Person/Virtual*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

~~Paid and Volunteer~~ PT Experience: Recognition

	Required	Minimum Hours Required	Accepted/ Considered	Maximum Accepted Hours	Not Accepted
Paid*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteer*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

~~Inpatient and Outpatient~~ PT Experiences: Setting

	Required	Minimum Hours Required	Accepted/ Considered	Maximum Accepted Hours	Not Accepted
Inpatient: Acute Care Hospital*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inpatient: Nursing Home/Skilled Nursing Facility/Extended Care Facility*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inpatient: Rehabilitation/Sub- acute Rehabilitation*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inpatient : Other Inpatient Facility*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Outpatient: Free-standing PT or Hospital Clinic*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outpatient: Home Health*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outpatient: Industrial/Occupational Health*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outpatient: School/Pre-school*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outpatient: Wellness/ Prevention/ Fitness Facility*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outpatient: Other Outpatient Facility*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: Attended PT Session as Patient*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: Attended PT session w/ Family Member*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: Observe Non-PT/PTA Healthcare Provider*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: Special Olympics Volunteer*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: HOSA: Future Health Professionals PT Competitive Event Participant*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## PTCAS Application – PT Observation Hours Section

**NOTE:** An \* denotes that a question or field is required to be completed by the applicant. Items in RED are additions/changes from the current form.

### Add Your **Physical Therapy** Observation Hours

Enter your paid or volunteer **physical therapy** observation hours in this section

Not all programs require **physical therapy** observation hours. Review online PTCAS directory for program-specific requirements. PTCAS will not determine if you met the minimum observation requirements for your designated **DPT** programs.

#### Facility

Facility Name\*

Street Address\*

Street Address 2

City\*

Country\*

State/Province\*

Postal Code\*

#### Experience Dates

Start Date\*

End Date\*

#### Experience Details

Recognition Type\*

☐ Paid ☐ Volunteer ☐ Both

**Experience Type\***

☐ In-person/Face-to-Face ☒ Virtual/Telehealth ☐ Hybrid In-person & Virtual

**Role of person(s) shadowed\*:**

☐ Physical Therapist (PT) ☐ Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA)  
☐ Both a Physical Therapist & Physical Therapist Assistant ☐ Other

**Setting and Hours of Experience:** Check and enter hours for all settings that apply to your experience in this facility.

<b>INPATIENT Settings: Facility generally admits patients overnight</b>	Hours Completed	Hours Planned / In Progress
Acute Care Hospital		
Nursing Home/Skilled Nursing Facility/Extended Care Facility		
Other Inpatient Facility		
Rehabilitation/Sub-acute Rehabilitation		
<b>OUTPATIENT Settings: Facility has no overnight patients</b>	Hours Completed	Hours Planned / In Progress
Free-standing PT or Hospital Clinic		
Home Health		
Industrial/Occupational Health		
Other Outpatient Facility		
School/Pre-school		
Wellness/Prevention/Fitness		
<b>OTHER Settings: Non-clinical settings</b>	Hours Completed	Hours Planned / In Progress
Attended PT Session as Patient		

Attended PT session w/ Family Member		
Observed Non-PT/PTA Healthcare Provider		
Special Olympics Volunteer		
HOSA: Future Health Professionals PT Competitive Event Participant		
Other		
<b>TOTAL # OF HOURS COMPLETED FOR ALL SETTINGS</b>		

**Patient Diagnoses / Patient Observed:** (Check all that apply)

- ☐ General Orthopedic (musculoskeletal)
- ☐ Neurological (neuromuscular)
- ☐ Cardiovascular / Pulmonary
- ☐ Integumentary (wound management)
- ☐ Geriatrics
- ☐ Pediatrics
- ☐ Sports
- ☐ Aquatics
- ☐ Women's Health
- ☐ Other

**PT Observation Hours Submission Type**

How do you want to have your PT observation hours verified?\*

▼

**Physical**

**Therapist/Physical Therapist Assistant Supervisor (if verification is required)**

Enter information about the physical therapist or physical therapist assistant who supervised the PT observation hours you entered on this form. Be sure to check with the program you are applying to confirm that verification of hours by a licensed physical therapist assistant is accepted.

First Name\*

Last Name\*

Phone

Email\*

License Number

License State

## Observation Hours Task Force: Alternative Experiences

### Guiding Principles

- Knowledge of the profession can best be achieved with alternative experiences.
- Relationships with mentors can be fostered asynchronously.
- Self-awareness is best promoted with intentional and guided activities.
- The qualities of a physical therapist or physical therapist assistant and the patient/client relationship is best achieved through shadowing.
- Purpose is to facilitate an informed decision about a physical therapy career choice.
- Promote diversity within the applicant pool for physical therapists & physical therapist assistants.

### Recommendations

1. Develop alternate PT experience certificates Pathway.
  - a. Utilize the APTA Learning Center for an Alternate PT Experience Pathway (See Below)
  - b. Live synchronous “Career Fair” opportunities for DPT & PTA
  - c. Moderated mentor/applicant chat group community for prospective student to connect with a broader pre-professional community.
2. Integration of Certificates of Completion into current application processes.
  - a. Create a mechanism in CAS to upload certificates.
  - b. Promote acceptance of alternate experience certificates & reduced observation hours.

### Plans for A Learning Center Alternate Pt Experience Pathway

- A. Student learning Outcomes
  1. Demonstrate knowledge of the profession of physical therapy.
    - a. Recognize the healthcare settings and patient/client populations.
    - b. Describe the physical therapist role in-of interprofessional practice.
    - c. Distinguish between DPT and PTA education, roles and responsibilities.
    - d. Recognize the continuum of physical therapy education & professional development.
    - e. Identify with physical therapy from the patient perspective.
  2. Understand the path to a career in physical therapy.
    - a. Describe the application processes for PTA and DPT programs.
    - b. Identify the common components of an application.
    - c. Demonstrate knowledge of the common educational components an academic program.
      - Typical coursework (lecture, lab, clinic)
      - Acquisition of skills, knowledge & behaviors
      - Internship/clinical experiences
  3. Demonstrate self-awareness in determining a career path.
    - a. Recognize the components of a viable application.
    - b. Recognize potential challenges to a physical therapy career.
      - Financial
      - Academic



- Personal qualities & lifestyle

B. Possible Methods within the Certificate Pathway

- Video with interactive assessment of learning
- Independent research (APTA, BLS OneStop, PT Moves Me, FSBPT, etc) followed by assessment of learning
- Interactive panel of therapists (live and/or asynchronous)
- Participation in Future Health Professionals events (<https://hosa.org/competition/>)
- Interactive learning activities: gaming, etc
- Participation in a healthcare focused extracurricular group or activity (e.g. HOSA: Future Health Professionals, etc.)
- Assessment of personal experience with PT
- Live Webinar / Q&A
- Chat / Discussion Boards

**Project Management**

A. Resources Needed

1. Organizational collaboration: APTA, ACAPT, Academy of Education,
  - a. Budget for Development
  - b. Ongoing responsibility for programming
2. Host Platforms
  - a. APTA Learning Center
  - b. Interactive LMS

B. Proposed Timeline

1. Within 6 months
  - a. Alternate PT Experience Pathway content outlines complete
  - b. Identify new content needs (video, webpage, gaming, etc)
  - c. Selection of Interactive module platform
2. Within 1 year
  - a. Development of new content
3. Within 2 years
  - a. Awarding certificates for the Alternate PT Experience pathway
  - b. Integration with PT & PTA CAS
  - c. Recognition/acceptance of alternate physical therapy experiences by ACAPT & PTA Educators.