COLLEGE OF PHYSIOTHERAPISTS of ONTARIO

Standards for Practice for Physiotherapists

Introduction

What are Standards?

Standards describe the expectations for professional practice. Many standards are compiled, written down and formally approved by the College. Other standards are unwritten expectations that define generally accepted practices or behaviours adopted by Ontario physiotherapists/physical therapists who work in similar contexts.

An overarching standard for physiotherapists in Ontario is to provide high-quality, safe and ethical care to patients.

Standards adopted by the College often incorporate federal and provincial laws and regulations, national and provincial standards of practice and ethical codes. A standard sets out an expected performance level against which actual performance can be compared. In other words, a standard is a criterion or basis for comparison that defines an expected level of performance.

Standards are also confirmed through the current literature in the area, the accepted clinical evidence, the use of experts and the generally accepted practices of physiotherapists who work in similar practice contexts.

The Standards for Practice for Physiotherapists in Ontario are a compilation of the College's documented standards. It is intended to be used by the College, its physiotherapists and the public as the source for all of the College's formalized standards.

Description of a Standard

Standards are established by consensus. They can originate from many sources and are based on the values, priorities and practice of the profession. Once they are approved by the College Council, standards provide guidance to physiotherapists about the expectations they must meet in their daily practice.

The College recognizes that many individual physiotherapists will strive to exceed the requirements described in the College standards. However, the standards are intended to define the baseline performance expectations for physiotherapists practising in Ontario.

The expectation for the College to compile and develop standards derives from Section 3 of the

Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA), that lays out the College's objects.

These include:

- to develop, establish and maintain standards of qualification for persons to be issued certificates of registration
- to develop, establish and maintain programs and standards of practice to assure the quality of the practice of the profession
- to develop, establish and maintain standards of knowledge and skill and programs to promote continuing competence among the members[1]
- to develop, establish and maintain standards of professional ethics for the members

Purpose of the Standards for Practice for Physiotherapists

The College's Standards for Practice for Physiotherapists are intended to provide an effective way to assist physiotherapists in understanding their professional obligations when practising in Ontario.

The Standards for Practice for Physiotherapists are organized into a framework. The framework assists understanding in a number of ways. First, by compiling all of the College's written and approved expectations, and ensuring ready access to the complete library of written and approved College standards.

Second, the Standards for Practice for Physiotherapists are subdivided into four subsections for easy reference:

- Standards for Qualification
- Standards for Professional Practice
- Standards for Continuing Competence
- Standards for Ethics

The choice of these subcategories parallels the standard setting duties of the College as defined in the RHPA. This facilitates physiotherapists' ability to find and apply the relevant written standard.

Third, complex standards that require additional interpretation or guidance to clearly establish the College's performance expectations have a guide.

In these ways, the Standards for Practice for Physiotherapists establish a consistent and user-friendly resource of the College's expectations of its physiotherapists.

The Standards for Practice are available in The Registrants' Guide section of the College website www.collegept.org.

1 Note, the term "member" is the term used in the RHPA; the College equivalent is "registrant"

Assumptions Underlying the Development of College Standards

The College develops standards based on important assumptions about the profession and the practice of physiotherapists. These include:

- Physiotherapists possess a body of specialized technical knowledge that is abstract and theoretical in nature and has been acquired through lengthy instruction. Professional practice requires that reasoned judgment be exercised in the application of this knowledge. Since this knowledge is not well known outside the profession, patients are often unable to assess the quality of services provided by physiotherapists, thus physiotherapists must take personal responsibility for ensuring safe, quality care.

- Physiotherapists are committed to maintaining standards through self-governance. The Ontario government has delegated the regulation of professional matters to the profession recognizing that only it has the knowledge to properly govern the profession. However, self-governance is only possible when the profession accepts the resulting legal and ethical responsibilities, which include developing, updating and where necessary, enforcing the profession's standards.

- Physiotherapists are committed to lifelong learning and the development of knowledge, skills and abilities throughout their careers. This allows physiotherapists to meet evolving standards of professional practice and demonstrate continuing competence as a component of public accountability.

- Physiotherapists are committed to the principle of accountability in their professional practice, in the practice of those under their supervision and in the profession as their service to society. Public interest takes precedence over self interest to protect the public from unethical or incompetent practice and is a core value for the profession.

How Standards are Developed

Development of College standards is based on three important principles:

1. They are developed by a reasonable and competent group of peers.
2. They are developed through a collaborative process.
3. They are approved by the College Council after in-depth consideration of the need for and the relevance of the expectation defined in the standard.

The standards development process incorporates a number of steps. These include:

1. Identifying the need for a standard
2. Reviewing the literature and professional documents relevant to the standard
3. Developing a discussion paper, including the key components for consideration
4. Consulting with relevant stakeholders on the discussion paper
5. Developing a proposed standard based on the content of the discussion paper and initial feedback
6. Reviewing and refining the proposed standard by Council members, College staff and physiotherapists in practice in a variety of regions and practice settings
7. Validating the proposed standards by physiotherapists to whom it might apply
8. Receiving College Council approval of the standard
9. Publishing the standard
10. Periodically reviewing/revising the standard

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Physiotherapist Compliance with College Standards

By definition, any standards published as Standards for Practice for Physiotherapists are standards of the College. Since written standards are one of the key criteria used by the College to define professional expectations physiotherapists are expected to meet these standards.

Some standards will be more relevant to some areas of practice than others. While registration with the College permits physiotherapists to practice within the broad scope of practice of physiotherapy, physiotherapists are obliged to practice within the sphere of their competence and to meet those standards that are consistent within the context of their practice environment and role description.

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