

# COMPETENCY PROFILE

## Essential Competencies of Physiotherapist Support Workers in Canada

July 2002

Project Partners:

Canadian Alliance of *Physiotherapy* Regulators

Canadian Physiotherapy Association

*Competency Profile:  
Essential Competencies of Physiotherapist Support Workers in Canada*

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# Contents

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Acknowledgements .....	iv
Section 1: Introduction and Background.....	1
Section 2: Key Role Statement.....	6
Section 3: Units of Competency for Group 1 Physiotherapist Support Workers.....	7
Section 4: Competencies and Performance Criteria for Group 1 Physiotherapist Support Workers.....	8
Unit 1: Accountability .....	8
Unit 2: Collection of Client Information .....	9
Unit 3: Intervention .....	9
Unit 4: Communication .....	10
Unit 5: Organization of the Delivery of Physiotherapy Services .....	11
Section 5: Units of Competency for Group 2 Physiotherapist Support Workers.....	13
Section 6: Competencies and Performance Criteria for Group 2 Physiotherapist Support Workers.....	14
Unit 1: Accountability .....	14
Unit 2: Collection of Client Information .....	15
Unit 3: Intervention .....	15
Unit 4: Communication .....	16
Unit 5: Organization of the Delivery of Physiotherapy Services .....	17
Section 7: Glossary .....	18
Appendix A: Provincial/Territorial Physiotherapy Regulators .....	20
Appendix B: Development of the Profile .....	21
Appendix C: Comparison of Group 1 and Group 2 Physiotherapist Support Workers .....	22
Appendix D: Bibliography .....	24



# Acknowledgements

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This Profile, *Competency Profile: Essential Competencies of Physiotherapist Support Workers in Canada* (the Profile) is the result of a collaboration led by the Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) and the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators (The Alliance).

The development of the Profile involved dozens of talented individuals who provided direction and support over the numerous iterations of this document and the stakeholder consultations. These individuals included physiotherapist<sup>1</sup> support workers, support worker educators, physiotherapists, regulators and physiotherapist educators.

The Steering Group guided the development of the Profile over a two-year period and provided the leadership to ensure that the processes of the project would result in a high-quality, useful tool that describes the knowledge, skills and attitudes of physiotherapist support workers in Canada. Amanda Cavannah, Susan Glover Takahashi, Dianne Parker-Taillon and Grace Torrance were part of the Steering Group throughout this time. Dave Wilkinson participated for the first year, while Heather McLaren was involved over the final year. CPA Program Coordinators Ellen Melis and Paul Harter provided support to the Steering Group for this project.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms physical therapist and physical therapy are synonyms for physiotherapist and physiotherapy and will be used interchangeably. Physiotherapist and related words are official marks used with permission by registered physiotherapists.



# Section 1: Introduction and Background

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## The Physiotherapist Support Worker Competency Project

Competency profiles are useful tools that help to better define the knowledge, skills and attitudes essential to the successful performance of an occupation. To date, a number of initiatives have taken place leading to the creation of competency profiles for various elements of the provision of physiotherapy services as described below.

In 1998, the *Competency Profile for the Entry-level Physiotherapist in Canada* was completed and published by the Canadian Alliance of *Physiotherapy* Regulators, the Canadian Physiotherapy Association and the Canadian University Physical Therapy Academic Council.

In 2000, the *Competencies Required to Safely Perform Spinal Manipulation as a Physical Therapy Intervention* was published by the College of Physical Therapists of Alberta following the completion of a national multisectoral study.

The development of the *Competency Profile: Essential Competencies of Physiotherapist Support Workers in Canada* (the Profile) is the third such publication completed collaboratively. The Profile is an important development as it is the first national documentation that describes the work of physiotherapist support workers.

The development of this publication is the outcome of a multimethod research project that included extensive consultations with physiotherapist support workers, physiotherapists, educators of physiotherapist support workers and physiotherapy regulators. For a more detailed description of the development process, refer to Appendix B.

The two partner organizations, representing the physiotherapy professional and regulatory areas, joined together to establish the essential competencies of physiotherapist support workers. The partner organizations are:

- Canadian Alliance of *Physiotherapy* Regulators
- Canadian Physiotherapy Association

## Purpose of the Profile

The *Competency Profile: Essential Competencies of Physiotherapist Support Workers in Canada* describes the essential competencies of two different categories of support workers in Canada, including a definition of these two categories of workers and an inventory of competencies – the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes for each of these groups. As well, this document describes the process used to develop the Profile. Users of this document are advised to be aware of any applicable provincial regulations, guidelines or standards related to this area.<sup>1</sup>

As the parameters of the health system in Canada and the factors affecting support workers are in a state of flux, this Profile is considered an evolutionary document that will change to reflect developments within the physiotherapy profession. The Profile is designed to attain a common

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A for a list of provincial/territorial physiotherapy regulators.

understanding of the situation regarding physiotherapist support workers and promote communication about the role of physiotherapist support workers across Canada.

A clear description of the Canadian physiotherapist support worker will clarify the difference between the essential competencies of the various groups of support workers and those of the physiotherapist. This Profile also captures some of the wide variation in abilities among physiotherapist support workers and reflects their current situation across Canada. This Profile is not intended to suggest that all jurisdictions or work environments need to include both Group 1 support workers and Group 2 support workers.

As is the case with all fields of health care, the number and qualifications of workers is best guided by the needs of the clients and the health outcomes desired. By defining two groups of support workers, the Profile aims to help physiotherapists and others responsible for planning physiotherapy services understand what assumptions can be made about the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the two groups of support workers and thus help determine the appropriate use of physiotherapist support workers.

The Profile is intended for a variety of uses in the Canadian physiotherapy community. Some of those uses are outlined in the next section.

## Uses of the Profile

The Profile is intended for the use of individuals and groups, both internal and external to the physiotherapy profession, at local, provincial, national and international levels.

Physiotherapist support workers, physiotherapists, students, educators, employers and others *may* use the Profile to:

- Guide self-reflection and guide physiotherapist support workers.
- Describe the core performance criteria for physiotherapist support workers in Canada.
- Develop and assess work standards for physiotherapist support workers.
- Assist in the appropriate assignment of client care activities to physiotherapist support workers.
- Assist in fair and valid assessments of the performance of physiotherapist support workers.
- Assist in the development of entry-level curricula for Group 1 physiotherapist support workers.
- Assist in the development of a program to evaluate substantial equivalency of physiotherapist support workers who may possess some or all of the essential competencies of the Group 1 physiotherapist support worker (for example, through a prior learning assessment and remediation system and/or an examination system).
- Offer guidance during human resource planning as to the appropriate roles and use of physiotherapist support workers.
- Offer guidance in the development of an accreditation program for physiotherapist support worker education programs.
- Facilitate the inter-jurisdictional mobility of physiotherapist support workers.

## Description of the Framework

This outcome-based, client-focused framework is similar to that used in two other profiles completed. A more detailed description has been previously outlined in the project report, *The Development of the Competency Profile for the Entry-Level Physiotherapist in Canada* (Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators et al., 1997).

The description of the areas of competency move from a general to a more specific delineation of the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes of the physiotherapist support worker as described below.

**Key Role:** Describes the purpose or goal of the physiotherapist support worker.

**Units:** Reflect the significant functions for effective performance by physiotherapist support workers in fulfilling their role.

**Competencies or Elements:** Describe the identifiable components of each unit in terms of the outcomes of the physiotherapist support worker.

**Performance Criteria:** Describe, for each competency or element, an interrelated set of factors that define the level of performance expected of the competent physiotherapist support worker.

**Range Statements:** Provide information about the specific context or critical aspects of performance by the physiotherapist support worker.

**Cues/Examples:** Provide examples about the context of work.

## Considerations and Assumptions Related to the Profile

Presented below are a number of considerations and assumptions explicitly acknowledged in developing this Profile.

### Considerations That Guided the Development of the Profile

That the Profile will

- Be the first national publication about the competencies of physiotherapist support workers. As such, it does not aim to serve all the information needs about physiotherapist support workers in Canada. It is hoped that this Profile will serve as the foundation in the development of other resource documents.
- Fully describe all key and essential aspects of physiotherapist support workers.
- Integrate existing common themes, philosophy, terminology and content for purposes of consistency.
- Recognize that physiotherapy practice is dynamic, as is the relationship between the physiotherapist and the physiotherapist support worker. It is in the totality of the mix that a physiotherapist support worker is competent. That is, work context, appropriate delegation and supervision in combination with the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes are necessary and interrelated to the competence of a physiotherapist support worker.
- Reflect the work and education of physiotherapist support workers as they exist across Canada but not necessarily describe them as found in each Canadian region nor identify local variations from the Canadian view.
- Reflect the current work and education of physiotherapist support workers with a view to their evolution.
- Include competencies that are measurable and valid.

### **Assumptions About the Relationship Between Physiotherapist Support Workers and Physiotherapists**

The following assumptions about the relationship between physiotherapist support workers and physiotherapists were made in developing the Profile:

- Physiotherapists maintain responsibility for the overall physiotherapy services provided. Physiotherapist support workers are responsible for providing care as assigned and within the limits of their knowledge and skills.
- Physiotherapist support workers must always be supervised by a registered/licensed physiotherapist who maintains responsibility and accountability for the client care provided. The definitions of assignment, delegation and supervision vary among physiotherapy regulators and may include direct and/or indirect supervision. Depending on the jurisdiction, on-site supervision may or may not be necessary.
- The type of supervision and the type of tasks assigned are determined by supervising physiotherapists in accordance with provincial physiotherapy regulations. Physiotherapists must take into account the education, training and competence of physiotherapist support workers, as well as the complexity of the environment and of individual client needs.
- Physiotherapist support workers may be assigned data collection and other components of the physiotherapy service by physiotherapists, based on their competence. Physiotherapists maintain responsibility for client assessment, interpretation of findings, determination and initiation of interventions, progression of interventions, reevaluation, and discharge planning, according to the individual needs of each client.

### **Assumptions About the Educational Background of Physiotherapist Support Workers**

To describe the competencies of any worker requires an understanding of their educational background.

#### ***Group 1 Physiotherapist Support Workers***

The educational background of *all* Group 1 physiotherapist support workers includes *all* of the following:

1. A curriculum that prepares students for physiotherapy practice models in Canada.
2. A broadly ranging curriculum to match the variety of physiotherapy environments and client populations.
3. A college diploma/certificate from a recognized<sup>1</sup> post-secondary program that includes a minimum of three terms full-time equivalent study of which
  - 3.1. One term's equivalent must be in physiotherapy-specific coursework (e.g., use of ambulatory aides, electrotherapy modality instruction, the principles of therapeutic exercise) that includes classroom and laboratory work; and
  - 3.2 One term's equivalent in physiotherapist-supervised practical training/fieldwork<sup>2</sup>; and
  - 3.3 One term's equivalent of generic, program-related coursework (e.g., anatomy, physiology).
4. Educational program faculty includes registered physiotherapist(s).

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<sup>1</sup> Recognized by the provincial/territorial ministry of education or equivalent.

<sup>2</sup> In Quebec, thérapeute en réadaptation physique (TRP) students may be supervised by TRPs during clinical placement.

### ***Group 2 Physiotherapist Support Workers***

The educational background of *all* Group 2 physiotherapist support workers includes *all* of the following:

1. Completion of “on-the-job” training that
  - Is physiotherapy-specific.
  - Is variable in length and content.
  - Depends on the background of the support worker and the needs of the client(s).
  - Is directed by a licensed/registered physiotherapist.
  - Prepares the worker for the provision of physiotherapy services in that specific work setting.
2. Various levels and types of formal education — but a similarity in that their education does not meet all aspects of the criteria for Group 1 physiotherapist support workers.

Some Group 2 physiotherapist support workers will have completed a post-secondary program in generic support worker education. Some Group 2 physiotherapist support workers will have diplomas or degrees in health-related or exercise-related areas but little or no physiotherapy-specific training. Some Group 2 physiotherapist support workers will not have completed post-secondary education.

### **Assumptions About All Physiotherapist Support Workers**

This Profile describes two groups of physiotherapist support workers and the essential competencies of all workers within each group.

Group 1 is a more homogeneous group with the consistency among these workers based on the similarity of their educational background. Workers in this group will use the work titles of physiotherapist assistant (PTA) or, if applicable, *thérapeute en réadaptation physique (TRP)*.<sup>1</sup> It is an assumption that all Group 1 physiotherapist support workers will have all the essential competencies listed here for that group.

It is likely that *some* Group 1 physiotherapist support workers will have more than the essential competencies listed for that group. This is particularly true of Group 1 workers who have

- more than the minimal educational background for Group 1 physiotherapist support workers prior to their support worker education;
- more than one year of college physiotherapist support worker education (e.g., TRPs);
- focused education in one or more areas related to physiotherapy (e.g., exercise training, fitness assessment)
- developed advanced knowledge, skills after education.

Group 2 is a heterogeneous group with a large variation in educational background. As a result, fewer assumptions about knowledge, skills and attitudes can be made of everyone within this group. Group 2 physiotherapist support workers should use work titles such as physiotherapist aide, rehabilitation assistant or recreation therapist. It is an assumption that all Group 2 physiotherapist support workers will have all the essential competencies listed here for this group.

*Some* Group 2 physiotherapist support workers who have more than the minimal education and/or significant work experience may be able to demonstrate (e.g., through prior learning assessment or supervised work skill assessment) that they have all or more of the essential competencies of Group 1 physiotherapist support workers.

<sup>1</sup> The TRPs are a group of workers who have completed three years of full-time study at a community college in Quebec. Many of these programs have trained TRPs since the 1970s. While no formal relationship between TRPs and physiotherapists presently exists, it is anticipated that legislation will be passed in 2002. This legislation will describe the circumstances in which TRPs will work under the supervision of a physiotherapist. Readers should contact the *Ordre professionnel des physiothérapeutes du Québec* for further details.



## Section 2: Key Role Statement

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Physiotherapist support workers are employed in a variety of practice settings, and their role is to assist the physiotherapist in ensuring that physiotherapy services are delivered in a safe, effective and efficient manner. Physiotherapist support workers help provide physiotherapy services that achieve and maintain optimal client outcomes. While services are provided under the supervision of a physiotherapist, physiotherapist support workers are accountable for their own performance. Physiotherapist support workers vary in their level of preparation and in the amount and type of education and/or training they have received.

Group 1 physiotherapist support workers have acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes either through formal post-secondary education or another substantially equivalent process. Group 1 physiotherapist support workers will include physiotherapist assistants (PTAs) and *thérapeutes en readaptation physique* (TRPs). The tasks and interventions assigned by the physiotherapist to Group 1 physiotherapist support workers are more complex than those assigned to Group 2 physiotherapist support workers, with an emphasis on direct client care.

Group 2 physiotherapist support workers have acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes through formal, informal and/or on-the-job training. Group 2 physiotherapist support workers may include physical therapist aides, auxiliary personnel or rehabilitation assistants. The range of tasks and interventions assigned by the physiotherapist to Group 2 physiotherapist support workers are more technical in nature with an emphasis on supporting the operation of the physiotherapy service.



## Section 3: Units of Competency for Group 1 Physiotherapist Support Workers

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### Units of Competency

**Unit 1: Accountability**

Works safely and demonstrates ethical behaviour.

**Unit 2: Collection of Client Information**

Gathers information and data related to the client's status as assigned by the physiotherapist.

**Unit 3: Intervention**

Implements the assigned physiotherapy interventions.

**Unit 4: Communication**

Communicates ethically and effectively.

**Unit 5: Organization and Delivery of Physiotherapy Services**

Functions effectively within the work setting.



# Section 4: Competencies and Performance Criteria for Group 1 Physiotherapist Support Workers

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## UNIT 1: ACCOUNTABILITY

*Works safely and demonstrates ethical behaviour.*

### 1.1 Respects the autonomy of the client.

*Performance Criteria*

- 1.1.1 Respects each client's unique mix of characteristics, including gender, age, ethnic origin, religion, culture, language, sexual orientation, health status and need for physiotherapy services.
- 1.1.2 Addresses and treats the client with respect.
- 1.1.3 Encourages the client to express his or her individual needs and assists the physiotherapist to ensure that the client receives the attention he or she needs.
- 1.1.4 Obtains the client's permission to proceed prior to performing assigned tasks.  
**Cues/Examples:** Gives clients or surrogates the opportunity to consent to or decline intervention.
- 1.1.5 Protects the client's dignity and right to privacy.
- 1.1.6 Maintains ethical boundaries in all support worker–client relationships.
- 1.1.7 Informs the client or surrogate about the effects of treatment and any inherent risks.

### 1.2 Demonstrates integrity and a commitment to the wellbeing of all clients.

*Performance Criteria*

- 1.2.1 Demonstrates behaviour that under no circumstances could be construed as harassment or abuse of clients, colleagues, associates or employees.

### 1.3 Demonstrates ethical behaviour.

*Performance Criteria*

- 1.3.1 Communicates position and qualifications honestly.
- 1.3.2 Takes responsibility for own behaviour and actions.
- 1.3.3 Works within the scope of personal abilities and limitations.
- 1.3.4 Collaborates with the physiotherapist to ensure that clients receive physiotherapy services from personnel with the required judgement, skill and knowledge.
- 1.3.5 Discloses potential conflict of interest situations.  
**Range Statement:** Informs physiotherapist, employer and client about situations that may enhance personal income or personal financial interests in services being offered to clients.

### 1.4 Maintains confidentiality.

*Performance Criteria*

- 1.4.1 Complies with established work setting protocols related to confidentiality as governed by applicable law, legislation and regulations.  
**Cues/Examples:** client confidentiality, family confidentiality, organizational confidentiality.

### 1.5 Addresses issues of client and provider safety.

*Performance Criteria*

- 1.5.1 Provides services in a clean, safe and accessible area.
- 1.5.2 Uses safety precautions.  
**Cues/Examples:** Follows universal precautions, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS).

- 1.5.3 Takes due precautions related to his or her own safety and the safety of others.  
**Cues/Examples:** Ensures personal safety, e.g., biomechanics, appropriate equipment use.
- 1.5.4 Recognizes adverse reactions to intervention and takes necessary action.  
**Cues/Examples:** Stops treatment (i.e., turns off machine), alerts physiotherapist, contacts Emergency Medical Services, initiates established emergency procedures.
- 1.5.5 Reports if any health team member or other health service provider appears to be providing service to the client in an incompetent, incapacitated or unethical manner.  
**Cues/Examples:** May need to address issue with supervisor.
- 1.5.6 Promotes client and provider safety in the provision of assigned physiotherapy services.  
**Cues/Examples:** Conducts in-service education in biomechanics, transfers.

## UNIT 2: COLLECTION OF CLIENT INFORMATION

*Gathers information and data related to the client's status as assigned by the physiotherapist.*

### 2.1 Performs selected measures or tests as assigned.

*Performance Criteria*

- 2.1.1 Tests are conducted within established guidelines and limits.  
**Range Statement:** Depending on the level of knowledge and skill, the support worker carries out tests that may include goniometry and pain rating scales.
- 2.1.2 Reports the results of the tests.  
**Cues/Examples:** verbal report to physiotherapist, documentation in client's health record.
- 2.1.3 Monitors client responses and status during the performance of assigned measures/tests.  
**Cues/Examples:** shortness of breath, pulse, respiration rate, skin colour, pain level.

### 2.2 Reports client information to supplement the physiotherapist's assessment/reassessment processes.

*Performance Criteria*

- 2.2.1 Communicates new information to physiotherapist in a complete and timely manner.  
**Cues/Examples:** client's family situation, home environment, health status, medication.

### 2.3 Contributes to the development and revision of the intervention activities within the physiotherapy plan.

*Performance Criteria*

- 2.3.1 Provides the physiotherapist with information related to the selection of intervention activities.  
**Cues/Examples:** availability of space in groups, the appropriateness of the group.

## UNIT 3: INTERVENTION

*Implements the assigned physiotherapy interventions.*

### 3.1 Contributes, as assigned by the physiotherapist, to the implementation of physiotherapy interventions.

*Performance Criteria*

- 3.1.1 Orients the client to the treatment area.  
**Cues/Examples:** physical layout, equipment.
- 3.1.2 Provides information about relevant service policies.  
**Cues/Examples:** cancellation, absenteeism policies.

- 3.1.3 Performs assigned physiotherapy interventions.  
**Range Statement:** Depending on the level of knowledge and skill, the support worker carries out a range of activities that may include the application of selected therapeutic exercises, functional mobility, the whirlpool, the use of aids and devices, electro-physical agents, deep breathing and coughing.  
**Cues/Examples:** Electro-physical agents may include heat, cold, interferential current, ultrasound, functional electrical stimulation (FES), transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS).  
**Cues/Examples:** Functional mobility may include transfers, ambulation, bed mobility, gait training, deep breathing and coughing.  
**Cues/Examples:** Selected therapeutic exercises may include general conditioning programs, range of motion, exercise groups, strengthening exercises, flexibility exercises.  
**Range Statement:** The range of activities assigned will vary depending on applicable law, legislation and regulations, as well as the established work setting protocols.
- 3.1.4 Discontinues specific interventions if a client has an adverse reaction or if the safety of the client is in danger.
- 3.1.5 Facilitates client participation in the intervention activities.  
**Cues/Examples:** Reinforces physiotherapist's directions, provides encouragement.
- 3.1.6 Participates as a team member in physiotherapy aspects of interdisciplinary client care.  
**Cues/Examples:** Co-schedules, works in partnership.

### 3.2 Reports observations relating to the assigned activities.

#### *Performance Criteria*

- 3.2.1 Reports client comments related to the intervention.  
**Cues/Examples:** pain, general wellbeing, apprehension, fear, progress, concerns.
- 3.2.2 Monitors client responses and status during the application of assigned specific interventions.  
**Cues/Examples:** shortness of breath, pulse, respiration rate and skin colour.
- 3.2.3 Reports to the physiotherapist the client's responses to interventions or changes in the client's status that may endanger his or her health or impact on his or her ability to participate in the intervention.  
**Range Statement:** In urgent situations where immediate attention is required, the support worker will respond according to established procedures.

## UNIT 4: COMMUNICATION

### *Communicates ethically and effectively.*

#### 4.1 Establishes and maintains effective communication with the physiotherapist.

##### *Performance Criteria*

- 4.1.1 Maintains a working relationship based on mutual trust and respect.
- 4.1.2 Uses effective strategies in verbal and written communication.
- 4.1.3 Conveys client information in a timely manner.  
**Range Statement:** Information conveyed will vary depending on established protocols.

#### 4.2 Establishes and maintains effective communication with the client and family.

##### *Performance Criteria*

- 4.2.1 Establishes a therapeutic relationship with the client and family based on respect and trust.

- 4.2.2 Uses communication strategies considering individual client and family needs.  
**Range Statement:** Strategies address issues such as language, hearing, vision, culture and cognition.  
**Cues/Examples:** Uses an interpreter, hearing aids, glasses, written reminders.
- 4.2.3 Answers general questions within his or her own knowledge and skill level.  
**Range Statement:** Seeks direction from the physiotherapist and/or other health team members to answer questions beyond his or her own knowledge and skill level.  
**Cues/Examples:** questions related to intervention activities or the treatment schedule.

#### 4.3 Establishes and maintains effective communication with health team members.

*Performance Criteria*

- 4.3.1 Establishes a working relationship with the health care team based on respect and recognition of expertise.
- 4.3.2 Uses effective strategies in verbal and written communication.  
**Range Statement:** May include written and verbal communication as assigned by the physiotherapist, based on work setting protocols.  
**Cues/Examples:** accurate, timely, respectful.

#### 4.4 Participates in documentation and recording of client information that support physiotherapy service delivery.

*Performance Criteria*

- 4.4.1 Documents work activities.  
**Range Statement:** May vary according to work setting protocols.  
**Cues/Examples:** workload measurement, attendance records.
- 4.4.2 Contributes to the client's health record.  
**Range Statement:** Documents information as assigned in compliance with applicable law, legislation and regulations and the established work setting protocols.  
**Cues/Examples:** progress notes, exercise flow charts.

### UNIT 5: ORGANIZATION OF THE DELIVERY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

*Functions effectively within the work setting.*

#### 5.1 Contributes to the implementation of the physiotherapy services as assigned.

*Performance Criteria*

- 5.1.1 Demonstrates an understanding of support worker roles and of the responsibilities of service provision within the health system.
- 5.1.2 Uses and monitors equipment and space to support service delivery.  
**Cues/Examples:** Notifies the physiotherapist if space and/or equipment are inadequate.
- 5.1.3 Complies with policies guiding the distribution of resources in the workplace.
- 5.1.4 Seeks information about available resources in the health system or community to support client care.

#### 5.2 Contributes to the creation of an effective practice environment.

*Performance Criteria*

- 5.2.1 Manages time effectively.
- 5.2.2 Practises self-evaluation to improve performance.
- 5.2.3 Performs activities in accordance with role requirements, applicable legislation, experience and job description.

5.2.4 Participates in quality improvement activities.

**Cues/Examples:** Assists in the evaluation of services, suggests changes for service improvements, maintains equipment and documents equipment maintenance.

5.2.5 Engages in educational or other activities for the continued development and maintenance of competence.

5.2.6 Establishes priorities for client caseload management in consultation with the physiotherapist.

5.2.7 Communicates about continuity in service delivery.

**Cues/Examples:** Communicates with physiotherapists and other health professionals who share responsibility for service delivery, about vacations and/or extended absences in order to ensure continued service.

### 5.3 Contributes to performance management of peers, physiotherapist assistant (PTA) students and volunteers.

5.3.1 Assigns tasks, as directed by the physiotherapist, to other support workers and volunteers<sup>1</sup>.

5.3.2 Provides appropriate supervision of volunteers and physiotherapist assistant (PTA) students, as directed by the physiotherapist.

### 5.4 Contributes to safe and cost-effective physiotherapy practice.

#### *Performance Criteria*

5.4.1 Participates in cost-effective acquisition and use of physical resources.

5.4.2 Participates in inventory control, safe storage of materials and supply management.

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<sup>1</sup> In Québec, TRP students may be supervised by TRPs during clinical placement.



## Section 5: Units of Competency for Group 2 Physiotherapist Support Workers

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### Units of Competency

**Unit 1: Accountability**

Works safely and demonstrates ethical behaviour.

**Unit 2: Collection of Client Information**

There are no essential competencies for Group 2 workers in this unit.

**Unit 3: Intervention**

Implements the assigned physiotherapy interventions.

**Unit 4: Communication**

Communicates ethically and effectively.

**Unit 5: Organization and Delivery of Physiotherapy Services**

Functions effectively within the work setting.



# Section 6: Competencies and Performance Criteria for Group 2 Physiotherapist Support Workers

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## UNIT 1: ACCOUNTABILITY

*Works safely and demonstrates ethical behaviour.*

### 1.1 Respects the autonomy of the client.

*Performance Criteria*

- 1.1.1 Respects each client's unique mix of characteristics, including gender, age, ethnic origin, religion, culture, language, sexual orientation, health status and need for physiotherapy services.
- 1.1.2 Addresses and treats the client with respect.
- 1.1.3 Encourages the client to express his or her individual needs and assists the physiotherapist to ensure that the client receives the attention he or she needs.
- 1.1.4 Obtains the client's permission to proceed prior to performing assigned tasks.  
**Cues/Examples:** Gives clients or surrogates the opportunity to consent to or decline intervention.
- 1.1.5 Protects the client's dignity and right to privacy.
- 1.1.6 Maintains ethical boundaries in all support worker–client relationships.

### 1.2 Demonstrates integrity and a commitment to the wellbeing of all clients.

*Performance Criteria*

- 1.2.1 Demonstrates behaviour that under no circumstances could be construed as harassment or abuse of clients, colleagues, associates or employees.

### 1.3 Demonstrates ethical behaviour.

*Performance Criteria*

- 1.3.1 Communicates position and qualifications honestly.
- 1.3.2 Takes responsibility for own behaviour and actions.
- 1.3.3 Works within the scope of personal abilities and limitations.

### 1.4 Maintains confidentiality.

*Performance Criteria*

- 1.4.1 Complies with established work setting protocols related to confidentiality as governed by applicable law, legislation and regulations.  
**Cues/Examples:** client confidentiality, family confidentiality, organizational confidentiality.

### 1.5 Addresses issues of client and provider safety.

*Performance Criteria*

- 1.5.1 Provides services in a clean, safe and accessible area.
- 1.5.2 Uses safety procedures.  
**Cues/Examples:** Follows universal precautions, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS).
- 1.5.3 Takes due precautions related to his or her own safety and the safety of others.  
**Cues/Examples:** Ensures personal safety, e.g., biomechanics, appropriate equipment use.
- 1.5.4 Recognizes adverse reactions to intervention and takes necessary action.  
**Cues/Examples:** Stops treatment (i.e., turns off machine), alerts physiotherapist, contacts Emergency Medical Services, initiates established emergency procedures.

- 1.5.5 Reports if any health team member or other health service provider appears to be providing service to the client in an incompetent, incapacitated or unethical manner.

**Cues/Examples:** May need to address issue with supervisor.

## UNIT 2: COLLECTION OF CLIENT INFORMATION

*There are no essential competencies for Group 2 workers in this unit.*

## UNIT 3: INTERVENTION

*Implements the assigned physiotherapy interventions.*

### 3.1 Contributes, as assigned by the physiotherapist, to the implementation of physiotherapy interventions.

*Performance Criteria*

- 3.1.1 Orients the client to the treatment area.

**Cues/Examples:** physical layout, equipment.

- 3.1.2 Provides information about relevant service policies.

**Cues/Examples:** cancellation, absenteeism policies.

- 3.1.3 Performs assigned physiotherapy interventions.

**Range Statement:** Depending on the level of knowledge and skill, the support worker carries out a range of activities that may include application of heat and cold, selected therapeutic exercises, functional mobility, the whirlpool, the use of aids and devices.

**Cues/Examples:** Functional mobility may include transfers, ambulation, bed mobility.

**Cues/Examples:** Selected therapeutic exercises may include general conditioning programs, range of motion, exercise groups.

**Range Statement:** The range of activities assigned will vary depending on applicable law, legislation and regulations, as well as the established work setting protocols

- 3.1.4 Discontinues specific interventions if a client has an adverse reaction or if the safety of the client is in danger.

- 3.1.5 Facilitates client participation in the intervention activities.

**Cues/Examples:** Reinforces physiotherapist's directions, provides encouragement.

- 3.1.6 Participates as a team member in physiotherapy aspects of interdisciplinary client care.

**Cues/Examples:** Co-schedules, works in partnership.

### 3.2 Reports observations relating to the assigned intervention activities to the physiotherapist.

*Performance Criteria*

- 3.2.1 Reports client comments related to the intervention.

**Cues/Examples:** pain, general wellbeing, apprehension, fear, progress, concerns.

- 3.2.2 Monitors client responses and status during the application of assigned specific interventions.

**Cues/Examples:** shortness of breath, pulse, respiration rate and skin colour.

- 3.2.3 Reports to the physiotherapist the client's responses to interventions or changes in client's status that may endanger his or her health or impact on his or her ability to participate in the intervention.

**Range Statement:** In urgent situations where immediate attention is required, the support worker will respond according to established procedures.

## UNIT 4: COMMUNICATION

*Communicates ethically and effectively.*

### 4.1 Establishes and maintains effective communication with the physiotherapist.

*Performance Criteria*

4.1.1 Maintains a working relationship based on mutual trust and respect.

4.1.2 Uses effective strategies in verbal and written communication.

**Cues/Examples:** Includes written communication that may be assigned, such as client attendance records or equipment maintenance records.

4.1.3 Conveys client information in a timely manner.

**Range Statement:** Information conveyed will vary depending on established protocols.

### 4.2 Establishes and maintains effective communication with the client and family.

*Performance Criteria*

4.2.1 Establishes a working relationship with the client and family based on respect and trust.

4.2.2 Uses communication strategies considering individual client and family needs.

**Range Statement:** Strategies address issues such as language, hearing, vision, culture and cognition.

**Cues/Examples:** Uses an interpreter, hearing aids, glasses, written reminders.

4.2.3 Answers general questions within his or her own knowledge and skill level.

**Range Statement:** Seeks direction from the physiotherapist and/or other health team members to answer questions beyond his or her own knowledge and skill level.

**Cues/Examples:** appointment schedule, number of repetitions of exercises.

### 4.3 Establishes and maintains effective communication with health team members.

*Performance Criteria*

4.3.1 Establishes a working relationship with the health care team based on respect.

4.3.2 Uses effective communication strategies.

**Range Statement:** May include written communication as assigned by the physiotherapist, based on work setting protocols.

**Cues/Examples:** accurate, timely, respectful.

### 4.4 Participates in documentation and recording of client information that supports physiotherapy service delivery.

*Performance Criteria*

4.4.1 Documents work activities.

**Range Statement:** May vary according to work setting protocols.

**Cues/Examples:** workload measurement, attendance records.

4.4.2 Contributes to the client's health record.

**Range Statement:** Documents information as assigned in compliance with applicable law, legislation and regulations and the established work setting protocols.

**Cues/Examples:** progress notes, exercise flow charts.

## UNIT 5: ORGANIZATION OF THE DELIVERY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

*Functions effectively within the work setting.*

### 5.1 Contributes to the implementation of the physiotherapy services as assigned.

*Performance Criteria*

5.1.1 Demonstrates an understanding of support worker roles and of the responsibilities of service provision within the work setting.

5.1.2 Uses and monitors equipment and space to support service delivery.

**Cues/Examples:** Notifies the physiotherapist if space and/or equipment are inadequate.

5.1.3 Complies with policies guiding distribution of resources in the workplace.

### 5.2 Contributes to the creation of an effective practice environment.

*Performance Criteria*

5.2.1 Manages time effectively.

5.2.2 Practises self-evaluation to improve performance.

5.2.3 Performs activities in accordance with role requirements, applicable legislation, experience and job description.

5.2.4 Participates in quality improvement activities.

**Cues/Examples:** Maintains equipment, documents equipment maintenance.

5.2.5 Engages in educational or other activities for continued development and maintenance of competence.



## Section 7: Glossary

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**Accountability:** the ability to explain and take responsibility for one's actions that are consistent with the agreed-upon authority. (Adapted from Nurses Association of New Brunswick, 1995)

**Assignment:** the transfer, by a physiotherapist, of specific components of a client's service to a support worker. (Adapted from College of Physiotherapists of Ontario, 1996a)

**Client:** the person, group, community or organization receiving professional services, products or information. (Adapted from College of Physiotherapists of Ontario, 1996b)

**Competence:** the capacity to apply judgement and purposeful action to work with clients to achieve and maintain desired health outcomes. (Adapted from Glover Takahashi, 1997)

**Competency:** a cluster of related knowledge, skills and attitudes that affects a major part of one's job (a role or responsibility), that correlates with performance on the job and that can be measured against accepted standards. (Adapted from Parry, 1996)

**Conflict of Interest:** is broadly defined as a situation in which an individual making a decision (i.e., on behalf of the client) could be influenced, or could be perceived to be influenced by their personal, financial, business, or other concerns which are not in the client's best interests. (Adapted from the Canadian Alliance of *Physiotherapy* Regulators, 2002)

**Essential Competencies:** the repertoire of measurable knowledge skills and attitudes expected of a support worker throughout his or her career.

**Health:** a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing. It is the extent to which an individual or group is able, on the one hand, to realize aspirations and satisfy needs and on the other hand, to change and cope with the environment. Health is, therefore, seen as a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living; it is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities. (World Health Organization, 1984)

**Health promotion:** the process of enabling people to increase control of and improve their health. (World Health Organization, 1984)

**Informed consent:** voluntary consent given by a patient, without fear or duress, after being given the appropriate information about the procedure.

**Physiotherapist:** used interchangeably with physical therapist to describe the primary health service practitioner licensed or registered to use that title. Physiotherapists work with their clients to plan and carry out individually designed intervention programs aimed at the maintenance, improvement or restoration of physical functioning, the alleviation of pain and the prevention of physical dysfunction. Physiotherapists provide clients with preventative, diagnostic and therapeutic services to restore their function and prevent disability arising from disease, trauma or injury. (Adapted from The Physiotherapy Act in Ontario, 1991)

**Physiotherapy:** physiotherapy is a first-contact, autonomous, client-focused health profession dedicated to improving and maintaining functional independence and physical performance; preventing and managing pain, physical impairments, disabilities and limits to participation; and promoting fitness, health and wellness. The Canadian Physiotherapy Association emphasizes that an assessment, intervention or evaluation — unless provided by a physiotherapist or under the direction of a physiotherapist — is not physiotherapy, nor should it be represented or funded as such. The legal definition and scope of practice for physiotherapists is found within the provincial (or territorial) regulations or legislation. (Adapted from Canadian Physiotherapy Association, 2000a)

**Physiotherapy intervention:** the purposeful and skilled interaction of the physiotherapist, or a trained individual working under the physiotherapist's direction and supervision, with the client, using various methods and techniques to produce changes in a client's condition and to meet established client-centred goals and health outcomes. (Adapted from American Physical Therapy Association, 1995)

**Self-evaluation:** ongoing appraisal of one's own practices in order to increase personal competence and benefit future practice.

**Term:** For the purposes of this document, term is used interchangeably with session or semester. One term is an academic period of study that is 14 to 16 weeks in length. For full-time clinical placements, a term is a minimum of 8 weeks in length.

**Supervision:** overseeing the actions or work of an individual to ensure that he or she has the knowledge, skills and abilities to perform a given task. Supervision allows the physiotherapist to make a judgement about the supervisee's abilities to competently perform certain tasks. Supervision may be direct or indirect. Indirect supervision may include, but not be limited to, chart review, third-party reporting, video review, telephone contact and communication. (Adapted from College of Physiotherapists of Ontario, 1996a)



## Appendix A: Provincial/Territorial Physiotherapy Regulators

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### **YUKON** Physiotherapy Regulatory Organization

Contact: Roberta Prilusky  
Consumer Services Department of Justice  
Box 2703  
Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6  
Tel: (867) 667-5360  
Fax: (867) 667-3609

### College of Physiotherapists of **BRITISH COLUMBIA\***

302-1765 West 8<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Vancouver, B.C. V6J 5C6  
Tel: (604) 730-9193  
Fax: (604) 730-9273

### College of Physical Therapists of **ALBERTA\***

5555 Calgary Trail S.  
Ste 1350, Weber Centre  
Edmonton, Alta. T6H 5P9  
Tel: (780) 438-0338  
Fax: (780) 436-1908

### **SASKATCHEWAN\*** College of Physical Therapists

Room G-20,  
St. Paul's Hospital  
1720 20<sup>th</sup> St. W.  
Saskatchewan, Sask. S7M 0Z9  
Tel: (306) 931-6661  
Fax: (306) 931-7333

### Association of Physiotherapists **MANITOBA\***

209-675 Pembina Hwy  
Winnipeg, Man. R3M 2L6  
Tel: (204) 287-8502  
Fax: (204) 474-2506

### College of Physiotherapists of **ONTARIO\***

230 Richmond St. W., 10th Fl.  
Toronto, Ont. M5V 1V6  
Tel: (416) 591-3828  
Fax: (416) 591-3834

### Ordre professionnel des physiothérapeutes du **QUEBEC\* (O.P.P.Q.)**

7101 rue Jean-Talon Est, Bureau 1120  
Anjou, Que. H1M 3N7  
**Tel: (514) 351-2770**  
Fax: (514) 351-2658

### College of Physiotherapists of **NEW BRUNSWICK**

57 King St., Ste. 402  
Saint John, N.B. E2L 1G5  
Tel: (506) 642-9760  
Fax: (506) 642-9770

### **NOVA SCOTIA** College of Physiotherapists

6960 Mumford Rd., Ste. 25  
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3L 4P1  
Tel: (902) 454-0158  
Fax: (902) 453-1168

### **P.E.I.** College of Physiotherapists

P.O. Box 3286  
Riverside Drive  
Charlottetown, P.E.I. C1A 8W5  
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### **NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR** College of Physiotherapists

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## Appendix B: Development of the Profile

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The development of the profile took place in four phases:

### **Phase 1: Initial Development**

In February 2000, a Steering Group with representation from the professional association, physiotherapy regulators, support workers and support worker educators was formed to oversee the project, and the services of Assessment Strategies Inc. were contracted to facilitate the development and validation process. A Working Group was then appointed to develop the initial draft of the Profile and to work on subsequent versions based on the feedback received from the stakeholders. With advice from the Steering Group, the consultant proceeded to a review of the relevant literature and gathered a number of documents to guide the development process.

### **Phase 2: Development of the Profile**

The Working Group, composed of six members representing physiotherapists, physiotherapy regulators, physiotherapy educators, physiotherapist support workers and physiotherapist support worker educators from all regions of Canada, met for two days in April 2000 to produce the initial draft of the Profile. When developing the Profile, the Working Group differentiated between two groups of physiotherapist support workers (Group 1 and Group 2), identifying the essential competencies that would be expected for each.

### **Phase 3: Stakeholder Consultation and Profile Revision**

During each of three consultations, representatives from key stakeholder groups were asked for feedback on the draft Profile. Groups consulted included Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) Board members, CPA Branch and Division representatives, members of the Canadian University Physiotherapy Academic Council (CUPAC), The Canadian Alliance of *Physiotherapy* Regulators (the Alliance), representatives of the provincial regulatory organizations, physiotherapists, support workers and educators in support worker programs. The respondents were given a defined time period to respond to a survey. During the consultation in the fall of 2001, focus groups were held in all provinces.

Members of the Steering Group and Working Group incorporated the feedback received into the draft Profile. An ad hoc expert group was convened to assist with the third revision based on feedback received during the fall 2001 consultation.

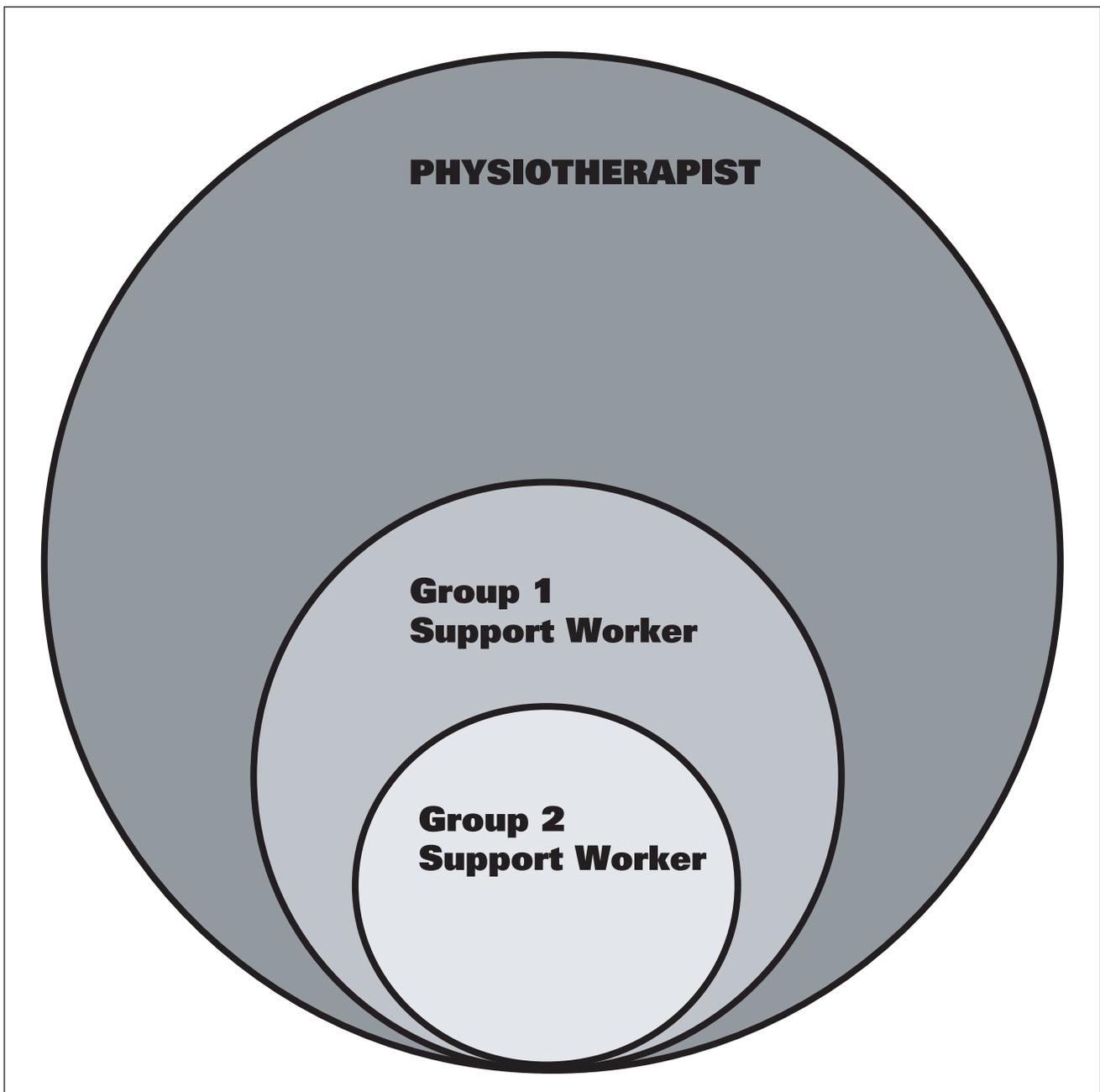
A final consultation took place in March 2002, resulting in the decision to finalize the document. The Profile was approved by the CPA and Alliance Boards in April 2002 in preparation for publication.

### **Phase 4: Publication of the Profile**

The profile was published in June 2002 and available for distribution in July 2002.



## Appendix C: Comparison of Group 1 and Group 2 Physiotherapist Support Workers



**FIGURE 1.** Illustration of the competencies of physiotherapists, Group 1 physiotherapist support workers and Group 2 physiotherapist support workers

## Comparison (differentiation) of Two Categories of Physiotherapist Support Workers<sup>1</sup>

Educational requirements	Relationship with Physiotherapist	Type of Work, i.e., Functions Transferred
<b>Group 1 Physiotherapist Support Worker</b> <b>Work titles, e.g., physiotherapist assistant (PTA), thérapeute en réadaptation physique (TRP)<sup>2</sup></b>		
<p>Formal education that includes the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes that prepare the worker to work in a variety of physiotherapy work settings, with a variety of patient populations, as a member of the physiotherapy care team.</p> <p>The educational background of <i>all</i> Group 1 physiotherapist support workers includes <i>all</i> of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A curriculum that prepares students for physiotherapy practice models in Canada.</li> <li>2. A broad range of curriculum to match the variety of physiotherapy environments and client populations.</li> <li>3. A college diploma/certificate from a recognized<sup>3</sup> post-secondary program that includes a minimum of three terms full-time equivalent study of which:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1 One term's equivalent must be in physiotherapy-specific coursework (e.g., use of ambulatory aids, electrotherapy modality instruction, the principles of therapeutic exercise) that includes classroom and laboratory work; and</li> <li>3.2 One term's equivalent in physiotherapist-supervised practical training/fieldwork<sup>4</sup>; and</li> <li>3.3 One term's equivalent of generic program-related coursework (e.g., anatomy, physiology).</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. Educational program faculty includes registered physiotherapist(s).</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• works under PT's direction and supervision.</li> <li>• PT may or may not be required to provide on-site supervision.<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• direct and non-direct patient care.</li> <li>• assists PT in carrying out portions of care.</li> <li>• for medically stable patients, provides care under the supervision of a PT.</li> <li>• tasks are of an ongoing, observational and assistive nature.</li> <li>• tasks and interventions assigned are more complex, and their direct "hands-on" patient involvement is greater than Group 2 workers.</li> <li>• may participate in the collection of qualitative and quantitative patient data related to the patient's physical status and functional abilities as assigned by the PT, e.g., performs selective objective tests/measures or procedures.</li> <li>• may assist the PT in the determination of the client's needs and may contribute to the development and revision of the intervention plan.</li> <li>• assists the PT in evaluating the effectiveness of specific treatment interventions in relation to identified client outcomes.</li> <li>• documentation of work (will vary depending on work setting protocols and applicable regulations).</li> <li>• duties do not include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• working as independent practitioners.</li> <li>• assessment planning.</li> <li>• independent treatment planning or independent treatment modification.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Group 2 Physiotherapist Support Worker</b> <b>Work titles, e.g., physiotherapist aide, rehabilitation assistant, multi-skilled worker, exercise therapist</b>		
<p>Context-specific training that includes the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes that prepare the worker to work on that site, in that work team, with those patients, in the manner described.</p> <p>In addition, the worker may have formal and/or informal education that meets some but not <i>all</i> of the conditions noted for Group 1.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• works under PT's direction and supervision.</li> <li>• PT on-site supervision recommended or required.<sup>5</sup></li> <li>• may also accept assignments from other health care professionals.</li> <li>• may work collaboratively with Group 1 support workers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assignments that match workers' context-specific training.</li> <li>• duties range from custodial (e.g., hot pack machine maintenance), system support (e.g., retrieval and maintenance of crutches and walkers) and assisting with direct patient care interventions.</li> <li>• "technical" service providers.</li> <li>• less direct "hands-on" patient care focus.</li> <li>• limited patient-specific documentation, which varies depending on work setting protocol and applicable regulations.</li> <li>• duties do not include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• working as independent practitioners.</li> <li>• assessment planning.</li> <li>• independent treatment planning or independent treatment modification.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup>. Adapted from: Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators. (2000). *National Guidelines for Support Workers in Physiotherapy Practice in Canada*. Toronto, Ontario:Author.

<sup>2</sup>. The TRPs are a group of workers who have completed three years of full-time study at a community college in Quebec. Many of these programs have trained TRPs since the 1970s. While no formal relationship between TRPs and physiotherapists presently exists, it is anticipated that legislation describing the circumstances in which TRPs will work under the supervision of a physiotherapist will be passed in 2002. Readers should contact the Ordre professionnel des physiothérapeutes du Québec for further details.

<sup>3</sup>. Recognized by the provincial/territorial ministry of education or equivalent.

<sup>4</sup>. In Quebec, TRP students may be supervised by TRPs during clinical placement.

<sup>5</sup>. Requirement for on-site supervision by a physiotherapist varies but must be in accordance with provincial/territorial regulations.



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