

Physical Therapist Assistant

■ Job Description

The physical therapist assistant (PTA) is a skilled technical worker who is a graduate of a physical therapist assistant educational program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE). The PTA performs selected physical therapy treatments and related duties as delegated by the physical therapist to assist in client-related activities.

■ Job Settings

Hospitals, rehabilitation centers, public schools and schools for handicapped children, nursing homes, long-term care centers, sports medicine clinics, physical therapy centers, and home health care companies

■ Projected Need

Physical therapist assistant is one of the top 50 fastest growing occupations in the state. Employment is also expected to increase much faster than average nationally through 2010.

However, growth may be slower in the short run due to changes in federal laws. New laws now limit insurance payments for physical therapy services. Over the long run, demand will continue to rise with the increase in the elderly population. This population is vulnerable to chronic conditions that require therapy. These patients often need extra assistance in their treatment, making the role of assistants and aides very important. In addition, licensed physical therapist assistants can reduce the cost of services. This is because they can provide many aspects of the treatment prescribed by the physical therapist.

In Illinois, there were about 3,900 people employed in this small occupation in 2000.

■ Salaries

Nationally, the median wage for physical therapist assistants is \$16.96 per hour. Half of all physical therapist assistants earn between \$14.37 and \$20.21 per hour.

In Illinois, entry-level wage is \$11.99 per hour. Experienced assistants receive \$18.69 per hour. Median hourly wage is \$16.45.

■ Related Careers

Any of the other rehabilitative therapies or nursing might provide similar personal satisfactions.

■ Differences in Training

A physical therapist assistant must complete a two-year associate degree program accredited by the CAPTE. The course of study includes one year of general education and one year of technical courses on physical therapy procedures and clinical experience. Admission into physical therapist assistant programs is competitive, with three to five applicants for each available opening. It is not unusual for colleges to have long waiting lists of prospective candidates.

The following Illinois community colleges offer associate degree physical therapist assistant programs:

Black Hawk College - Moline
Carl Sandburg College - Galesburg
College of DuPage - Glen Ellyn
Illinois Central College - East Peoria
Kaskaskia College - Centralia
Lake Land College - Mattoon
Morton College - Cicero
Oakton Community College - Des Plaines
Southwestern Illinois College - Belleville

■ Related Educational Programs

The programs of study listed below are the recommended areas of study to pursue for this occupation. Clicking on these will lead to files that show in-state and national schools that offer these programs.

The following link(s) will take you to CIS for more information. CIS requires an ID and password that can be obtained at <http://cis.ilworkinfo.com/loginhelp/>. You must log into CIS prior to clicking on the links below.

[Physical Therapy Assisting](#)

■ Skill Standards

One way to prepare for employment in this occupation is through meeting the standards endorsed by the Illinois Occupational Skill Standards and Credentialing Council (IOSSCC). Through the combined efforts of business, industry and education leaders, skill standards are developed for those occupations critical to the Illinois economy. *Skill standards define what you must know and be able to perform in order to pass a credentialing examination and obtain and keep a job in this field.* For more information regarding skill standards, contact the guidance counselor at your local high school or community college, visit your local Illinois Employment and Training Center (IETC), or access skill standards information at <www.ioes.org/cte_curr/oss/index.html>.

The IOSSCC has endorsed skill standards for the physical therapist assistant cluster organized around the following performance areas for physical therapist assistant:

- Administrative/clerical functions
- Communication skills
- Support services
- Patient care services
- Assessment and data collection functions
- Physical therapy interventions
- Physical agents and mechanical modalities

■ Credentials

To use the title "Physical Therapist Assistant," a person must graduate from an associate degree PTA program accredited by the CAPTE. Licensing requirements in Illinois include the passing of a national exam.

■ Advanced Training

A master's degree is required to practice as a physical therapist and to evaluate patients, supervise PTAs, conduct research, and teach.

■ Resources

American Physical Therapy Association
1111 N. Fairfax Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-1488
Phone: 800.999.2782

<http://www.apta.org>

Select "Jobs/Career Center" then "Choosing Physical Therapy as a Career."

The association annually offers scholarships to minority students enrolled in accredited physical therapy programs.