

Guidelines for physiotherapists working with assistants in physiotherapy practices/services

Endorsed by Board of Directors 17 December 2007

1.0 Introduction

The Australian Physiotherapy Council (APC) recognises the need for nationally consistent guidelines for physiotherapists working with physiotherapy assistants and physiotherapy aides. This document provides definitions, general principles regarding physiotherapy assistants and physiotherapy aides, guidelines for physiotherapists working with physiotherapy assistants and physiotherapy aides, responsibilities of physiotherapy assistants and physiotherapy aides, and recommendations regarding education and training of physiotherapy assistants and physiotherapy aides.

2.0 Definitions

- 2.1 **“Responsible physiotherapist”** is a person who is registered to practice physiotherapy in the State or Territory where the physiotherapy assistant or physiotherapy aide is working.
- 2.2 **“Physiotherapy assistant”** is a person who has completed a Certificate IV level qualification in Physiotherapy Assistance, or equivalent training in the vocational sector that is specified and assessed in accordance with the National Health Training Package¹.
- 2.3 **“Physiotherapy aide”** is a person who is vocationally trained to perform designated routine tasks related to the operation of a physiotherapy service. A physiotherapy aide will work under the direct supervision of a responsible physiotherapist at all times.
- 2.4 **“Prescribed treatment plan”** is detailed written instruction specifying the procedures to be performed by a physiotherapy assistant or physiotherapy aide. The prescribed treatment plan is written, signed and dated by the responsible physiotherapist. The prescribed treatment plan has a review date.
- 2.5 **“Instruction”** is the oral or written elaboration or explanation of a “prescribed treatment plan” and may include a training component.

¹ Until the Cert IV program is available nationally, assistants may have completed equivalent qualifications and workplace experience as recognised by the employer.

2.6 “**Supervision**” is the direction and oversight by a responsible physiotherapist of the performance of duties by a physiotherapy assistant or physiotherapy aide.

2.6.1 “**Direct supervision**” is the direction and oversight by a responsible physiotherapist who is physically present in the same treatment facility as the physiotherapy assistant or physiotherapy aide.

2.6.2 “**Indirect supervision**” is the direction and oversight by a responsible physiotherapist who is not physically present in the same treatment facility as the physiotherapy assistant or physiotherapy aide

3.0 General principles regarding physiotherapy assistants and physiotherapy aides

3.1 Physiotherapy assistants and physiotherapy aides cannot substitute for a physiotherapist in assessment, diagnosis, program planning, program evaluation or client/family education.

3.2 Supervision of physiotherapy aides by the responsible physiotherapist will be direct.

3.3 Supervision of physiotherapy assistants by the responsible physiotherapist may be direct or indirect and may depend on factors, including but not limited to:

- the risks associated with a patient’s condition;
- the risks associated with a certain task;
- the complexity of a certain task; and
- the practice setting and/or type of service or practice.

3.4 Procedures performed by a physiotherapy assistant must be in accordance with a prescribed treatment plan.

4.0 Guidelines for physiotherapists working with physiotherapy assistants and aides

The responsible physiotherapist must:

- have a thorough understanding of the roles of physiotherapy assistants and physiotherapy aides,
- provide adequate prescription and instruction to ensure that the tasks to be performed by physiotherapy assistants and physiotherapy aides are understood,
- ensure that, at all times, the physiotherapy assistant or physiotherapy aide has regular competency assessments, training and performance review for all tasks to be delegated by the responsible physiotherapist,
- seek informed consent from the client before allowing any management to be undertaken by a physiotherapy assistant or physiotherapy aide under the supervision and instruction of a physiotherapist,
- ensure the party paying for services agree that tasks will be performed by physiotherapy assistants and physiotherapy aides under the supervision and instruction of a physiotherapist,

- be readily available for consultation and management of any complications that may occur,
- monitor and supervise the performance of physiotherapy assistants and physiotherapy aides
- ensure that the physiotherapy assistant or physiotherapy aide:
 - is clearly and correctly identified as a physiotherapy assistant or physiotherapy aide;
 - is not passed off or allowed to be passed off as a physiotherapist;
 - understands the limits of their scope of practice;
 - is competent to undertake the tasks required in that facility;
 - works under clearly defined lines of communication;
 - is not requested or required to undertake a task which is outside their competence;
 - is aware of and follows all relevant safety precautions;
 - has an understanding of the role of physiotherapists, physiotherapy assistants and physiotherapy aides;
 - only undertakes the tasks for which they have appropriate competence;
 - has an appropriate level of professional indemnification; and
 - is aware of and complies with relevant aspects of the ethical principles and code of conduct of the physiotherapy profession and the employer.

5.0 Recommended Education and Training of Physiotherapy Assistants and Physiotherapy Aides

- 5.1** The recommended education and training for physiotherapy assistants must be a Certificate IV level or equivalent training in the vocational education and training sector that is specified and assessed in accordance with the National Health Training Package².
- 5.2** The recommended education and training of physiotherapy aides should be at Certificate III level in the vocational education and training sector, or equivalent qualifications and workplace experience.
- 5.3** The recommended minimum education and training of physiotherapy assistants and aides includes:
- Infection Control;
 - Manual Handling;
 - Basic medical terminology;
 - Emergency procedures;
 - Ethics;
 - Communication skills; and
 - Workplace specific skills/competencies.
- 5.4** Competency based training and assessment for physiotherapy aides is recommended to ensure minimum standards of practice in the workplace.

² Until the Cert IV program is available nationally, assistants may have completed equivalent qualifications and workplace experience as recognised by the employer.