

Physiotherapists practising in a defined field standard

Introduction

The general scope of practice for physiotherapists is intentionally broad to ensure the health and safety of the public yet allow for workforce flexibility and responsiveness to growing healthcare demands. As the physiotherapy profession continues to evolve, areas of practice including non-clinical may change or expand, and new fields of practice may emerge to meet health demands. While it is important to accommodate these initiatives, the health and safety of the public remain paramount.

A physiotherapist practising in a defined field is deemed to be competent in that area of practice when they demonstrate relevant and appropriate education and training and continuing professional development (CPD) specific to that field of practice. The approach the Physiotherapy Board (Board) has taken is one of self-regulation and evaluation. It is the responsibility of the physiotherapist and employer to ensure that their CPD activities support their defined field or area of practice.

New Zealand Law

[Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003](#)

Health Practitioners Competence Assurance (Restricted Activities) Order 2005

1. A defined field of practice

- 1.1 Practising in defined field refers to physiotherapists who are working in fields of practice that are not necessarily included in the New Zealand physiotherapy undergraduate programmes. These fields of practice include but are not limited to: nominated areas of practice, e.g. Sports physiotherapy and Pelvic physiotherapy; cervical manipulation (see Cervical manipulation standard); digital health; injection therapy; acupuncture; new or emerging areas. The defined field should be evidence-informed.
- 1.2 Non-clinical areas of practice include management, research and academia.
- 1.3 Activities such as cervical manipulation, injection therapy, acupuncture and other invasive techniques must follow any established standards or guidelines published by the Board and/or appropriate Special Interest Groups of Physiotherapy New Zealand.
- 1.4 Physiotherapists who are unsure if their defined field or area of practice falls within General Scope and meets the criteria described in this standard must contact the Physiotherapy Board.

2. Education, training and CPD

It is the physiotherapist's responsibility to:

- 2.1 ensure they have undertaken an appropriate, relevant and recognised education and training programme for practising in their defined field
- 2.2 ensure they work within their scope of practice, have professional support and mentoring structures in place, and meet their professional and ethical obligations

- 2.3 ensure they maintain competence in their defined field of practice by undertaking relevant and ongoing CPD and peer review
- 2.4 ensure that a balance exists for the known benefit and the known harm of a treatment or modality before incorporating it into their practice. This consideration is inherent in the informed consent process.

3. Ensuring competence

A physiotherapist should undertake a brief self-evaluation process to obtain a perspective on the safety and competence of their practice in their defined field. This evaluation should involve the following questions:

- Are the education and training undertaken in my defined field recognised by my peers as being appropriate for safe, evidence-informed practice?
- Have I continued to update my knowledge around the defined field of interest? Clear evidence for this must be included in any recertification documentation.
- Have I ensured that I do not work in isolation in my defined field of practice, and can I demonstrate that I am not isolated from peer input, mentoring and review?
- Would I be able to defend my position if an adverse event occurred?

In answering these questions, the physiotherapist needs to consider how confident they would be in defending their position if an adverse event occurred. Physiotherapists should balance both the known benefit and the known harm of a treatment or modality before incorporating it into their practice.

4. Disputes or complaints

In the event of a dispute or complaint about a physiotherapist practising in a defined field, the Board will consult with experts in that particular field of practice. These advisors will consider whether the education, training and CPD activities undertaken are appropriate and support the practitioner's practice rationale. The associated patient health records would also be a key source of information (See Physiotherapy health records standard).

5. Insurance

Further consideration should be given to whether work in a defined field would be covered by Public Liability Insurance or District Health Board (DHB) insurance. The Board recommends that physiotherapists seek advice from their respective insurance companies or DHB-based legal representative, or from an independent legal representative.

Related resources

Aotearoa New Zealand Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (2018) Principle 2.5, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 7.1

Cervical manipulation standard

Informed consent standard

Physiotherapy health records standard

Physiotherapy practice thresholds in Australia & Aotearoa New Zealand (2015) Key competencies 2.2, 4.1, 4.5,

December 2019

This statement is scheduled for review in 2024. Legislative changes may make this statement obsolete before this review date