

APTA Clinical Specialization Policy



HOD Y07-25-63-45: [Amended: HOD Y07-25-62-17; HOD Y07-23-07-09; Initial: HOD Y06-19-67-31] [Policy]

Clinical specialization in physical therapy is a voluntary and unrestricted process. Participation is initiated at the request of the individual, and no attempt is made to prohibit others from practicing in a specified area, nor is it required that physical therapists who are certified restrict their practice to the area in which they are certified. However, physical therapists shall not purport to be a “board-certified clinical specialist” unless they have successfully completed the certification process as developed by the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties.

The purposes of the association's Clinical Specialization Program can best be achieved through a centralized organization that provides reasonable uniformity in the level and type of standards adopted as the basis for each specialty and subspecialty. The program provides for the participation of consumer representatives in the decision-making process. The organizational body that guides the American Physical Therapy Association Clinical Specialization Program is ABPTS and its appointed specialty councils.

ABPTS establishes criteria for each specialty and subspecialty, and the APTA House of Delegates approves all specialties and subspecialties in physical therapist practice.

Specialties

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| Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Physical Therapy | 1981 |
| Orthopaedic Physical Therapy | 1981 |
| Pediatric Physical Therapy | 1981 |
| Sports Physical Therapy | 1981 |
| Clinical Electrophysiologic Physical Therapy | 1982 |
| Neurologic Physical Therapy | 1982 |
| Geriatric Physical Therapy | 1989 |
| Pelvic and Women’s Health Physical Therapy | 2006 |
| Oncologic Physical Therapy | 2016 |
| Wound Management Physical Therapy | 2019 |
| Primary Care Physical Therapy | 2025 |

ABPTS approves certification of clinical specialists in each specialty and subspecialty. The specialty councils define, develop, and modify the requirements for certification and recertification. The APTA Board of Directors directs funding for the specialist certification program and serves as an appeal body for certification petitioners and candidates.

Explanation of Reference Numbers [use for House policy]:

HOD P00-00-00-00 stands for House of Delegates/**month**/**year**/**page**/**vote** in the House of Delegates minutes; the "P" indicates that it is a position (see below). For example, HOD P06-22-05-04 means that this position can be found in the June 2022 House of Delegates minutes on Page 5 and that it was Vote 4.

P: Position | Y: Policy

Last Updated: 10/01/2025

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