

**Physical Therapists as Exercise Experts with
Aging Adults Curriculum Guidelines**
For Physical Therapist Professional Degree Programs

Section on Geriatrics, APTA

2009

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Task Force – Physical Therapists as Exercise Experts with Aging Adults

The Task Force met informally in 2004 and then was funded by the Section on Geriatrics to complete an intense array of tasks over the next three years to accomplish the goal of having physical therapists recognized as exercise experts with aging adults. The bases of the Task Force were predicated on the facts that exercise is a powerful intervention for the mediation of chronic disease and functional disability. No other intervention has been shown to be as effective in addressing deficiencies in muscle mass, bone mineral content, muscle strength, dynamic balance, overall physical activity level (Nelson, 1994), gait, speed, and physical function.

With a large percentage of older Americans classified as obese and almost 50% reporting sedentary lifestyles, it was imperative that effective strategies for exercise were developed and implemented. As experts in movement and exercise and with a thorough knowledge of pathology and its effects on all systems, physical therapists are the ideal professionals to promote, guide, and manage the exercise activities and efforts of America's aging adults.

A concerted effort by the Section on Geriatrics to promote the “power” and effectiveness of exercise would positively influence the health and well-being of America's older adults. The strategic plan of the Task Force focused on the promotion of the physical therapist's role in promoting exercise for aging adults, especially since APTA had become a sponsor of the Aging Blueprint.

Highlights of the goals and some of the objectives of the Task Force are as follows:

GOAL I – To assure a comprehensive knowledge base for physical therapist professional education regarding the examination and intervention for the exercise needs of the aging population

Objectives

1. Develop a series of continuing education programs that will assure that all physical therapists have expertise in exercise prescription and programs for the aging population (in place since 2006)
2. Provide sample curricula content and educational and practice resources on exercise and physical activity for aging adults to all physical therapist professional education programs
3. Develop educational materials for the physical therapist about the unique opportunities to promote physical well-being for the aging population
4. Design a certification program within the APTA/Section on Geriatrics for physical therapists to become Certified Exercise Specialists for the Aging Population (beginning in 2009)

5. Present programming on exercise programs for the aging population at state and national physical therapy conferences (Ongoing)

GOAL II – To establish practice guidelines for safe and effective exercise parameters for the aging population

Objectives

1. Develop guidelines for safe exercise programs for the aging population (patients and clients) with multiple conditions in multiple settings, based, when feasible, on available evidence (Guidelines available for osteoarthritis, osteoporosis, and diabetes)
2. Develop exercise guidelines for aging adults (In Gerinotes January 2008 and on web site)
3. Develop guidelines for community screening programs for the exercise needs of the aging population (will be available on Section web site for members)
4. Promote the physical therapist as a first line of defense for screening (assess strength, flexibility, balance, posture, aerobic capacity/endurance) for exercise programs for the aging population (motion approved by APTA's House of Delegates on supporting an annual visit to your physical therapist)
5. Develop consumer power point presentations to be taken to local community groups (Available through the Section)

GOAL III – To identify the needs for and enable consistent integration of the best evidence to support exercise for the aging population

Objectives

1. Create and update an annotated bibliography on evidence-based literature on exercise for the aging population (In place and clinical scenarios included in Hooked on Evidence)

GOAL IV – To effectively educate the professional communities about the role and benefits of physical therapists as exercise experts for the aging population

Objectives

1. Publish materials as appropriate in Section publications (Done)
2. Disseminate the annotated bibliography on efficacy of exercise for the aging population (Done in Section publication)
3. Raise awareness within the medical profession of the important role of physical therapists as exercise experts in the provision of exercise programs for the aging population (Be a Hip-MD)
4. Develop prescription pad to be utilized by nurse practitioners, physicians assistants, etc to refer patients/clients to a physical therapist for examination and exercise intervention (Prescription pad completed)
5. Develop motion to House of Delegates investigating possibility of physical therapists being part of the Welcome to Medicare program (Passed by the House of Delegates)
6. Endorse physical therapists serving as role models for public through participation in physical activity/exercise (Passed by House of Delegates)

GOAL V – To effectively educate the consumer communities of the role and benefits of physical therapists as exercise experts for the aging population

Objectives

1. APTA and Section for Geriatrics coordinate communications strategies to inform the public of the evidence supporting exercise for the aging population and the unique role physical therapists, as exercise experts, play in such exercise programs
2. Provide resource materials for the public on the importance and role of physical therapists as experts in exercise programs for the aging population (3 Consumer Brochures developed)
3. Establish links with related organizations (e.g., AARP, NOF, NAF) to promote the role of physical therapists as exercise experts for the aging population

The Task Force was charged to develop and initiate strategies to support and facilitate exercise for aging adults instruction in professional physical therapist education programs and to heighten awareness among academic and clinical faculty of the pressing need to do so.

Resources

A Normative Model of Physical Therapist Professional Education: Version 2004. Alexandria, Va: American Physical Therapy Association; 2004.

Guide to Physical Therapist Practice, Revised 2nd Ed. Alexandria, Va: American Physical Therapy Association; 2003.

Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education. Evaluative criteria for the accreditation of education programs for the preparation of physical therapists. Alexandria, Va: American Physical Therapy Association

Curricular Content

Purpose

The purpose of the curricular content in the attached document is to outline the essential elements of the curriculum instruction in examination and exercise intervention for aging adults that are appropriate for physical therapist professional degree programs. Content recommended includes foundational and clinical sciences. Terminal behavioral objectives and instructional objectives are provided in each area.

Contents

- Foundational Sciences Matrix
 - Physiology of normal aging
 - Behavioral sciences
- Clinical Sciences
 - Examination
 - Patient/client history
 - Systems review
 - Tests and measures
 - Clinimetric properties
 - Aerobic capacity/endurance tests and measures
 - Gait, locomotion, and balance tests and measures
 - Motor function tests and measures

- Muscle performance tests and measures
- Posture tests and measures
- Range of motion tests and measures
- Self-care, home management, work, community, and leisure tests and measures
- Multipurpose test batteries
- Questionnaires
- Evaluation, diagnosis, prognosis, and plan of care
- Interventions
 - Aerobic capacity/endurance training
 - Balance, coordination, and agility training
 - Body mechanics and postural stabilization
 - Flexibility exercises
 - Gait and locomotion training
 - Strength, power, and endurance training

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