

## Essential Functions of a Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) Learner

The Physical Therapist Assistant Program (PTAP) has established minimum essential requirements (*separate from academic standards for admission*), which every learner must meet, with or without reasonable accommodations, in order to fully participate in all aspects of the training and educational program.

**Prior to Admission:** candidates should review this list to become familiar with the expectations of a PTAP learner herein after referred to as “Essential Functions.”

**Following admission** into the professional phase of the program, each PTAP learner will be required to submit a signed copy of the Essential Functions for PTAP Learners form. Completed forms will be maintained in the individual learner’s file located in the Academic Coordinator of Clinical Education’s office (MS 157).

***If after admission into the PTAP any learner experiences a change in his or her ability to fulfill the Essential Functions requirements, the learner is required to inform the PTA Program Coordinator in writing.***

### Essential Functions for Physical Therapist Assistant Learners

Those individuals applying to the Physical Therapist Assistant Program (PTAP) should consider the following skills which have been identified as essential for all PTAs to be able to perform.

- Physical therapist assistants are technically trained individuals in physical therapy and provide certain physical therapy interventions after the physical therapist has examined and evaluated a patient and established a plan of care.
- The PTA follows the plan of care established by the physical therapist regarding the treatment interventions and patient care to be provided.
- The following standards indicate reasonable expectations of the PTA learner for the performance of common physical therapy functions and include:
 

Physical	Psychomotor
Cognitive	Environmental factors
Behavioral	Affective and communication functions
- The expectations for each of these functions will vary depending upon the clinical environment and specialty area of physical therapy practice. (*This list is not intended to be specific for use by an employer of a PTAP graduate since that would be determined by the specific employer and setting.*)

The PTAP adopted these Essential Functions in recognition of the patient’s right to safe and quality health care by our PTA learners and PTA graduates. The PTA learner must be able to apply the knowledge and skills required to function in a wide variety of clinical settings and situations, while providing the spectrum of physical therapy interventions. Each candidate in Mercer’s Associate of Applied Science degree program must be able to perform, with or without reasonable accommodations, each of these essential functions to fully participate in our PTA program and successfully complete the requirements for the AAS degree in PTA.

Adoption of these Essential Functions by the Physical Therapist Assistant Program is integrated with the patient’s right to safe and quality health care by our learners and graduates.

**Instructions:**

Each essential function is described with specific examples provided. Place a check in the appropriate box if **capable** of meeting the requirement or **not capable** of meeting the requirement. The last page of this form requires completion and signature.

- This form should be reviewed prior to applying to the Professional Phase of the PTA program.
- The completed form must be submitted no later than the first day of the summer semester of the Professional Phase after being accepted.

**1. Mobility and Psychomotor Skills:** The applicant must be able to have sufficient motor capabilities to perform the movements and skills required for providing safe, reliable and effective physical therapy interventions for patients across the lifespan. These include but are not limited to:

Specific examples for mobility and motor essential functions	<i>I am capable of meeting these requirements</i>	<i>I am not capable of meeting these requirements</i>
a. Ability to move or position patients and equipment which involves bending or stooping freely to floor level and reaching above the head.		
b. Ability to exert 25-50 pounds of force when lifting, carrying, pushing, or pulling.		
c. Ability to move or adjust patients and equipment which involves lifting, carrying, pulling, pushing, and guiding weights up to and including 50 lb.		
d. Ability to safely and efficiently transfer a 150 lb. patient from the bed to the wheelchair using maximal assistance.		
e. Ability to bend, twist, stoop, and balance safely.		
f. Coordination, speed and agility to assist and safely guard (protect) a patient who is walking, exercising or performing other rehabilitation activities.		
g. Ability to guide, resist and assist a patient or to provide emergency care, which may involve the activities of standing, kneeling, sitting, walking or crawling, for 90 minutes with no rest.		
h. Appropriate body mechanics for all skills related to physical therapy and react safely and appropriate to sudden and unexpected movements of patients/classmates.		
i. Ability to endure and successfully complete a 40-45 hour work week during clinical education courses, which includes standing, walking and stair climbing		
j. Ability to provide for the patient's safety in all physical therapy activities		
k. Manipulate and operate PTA equipment and demonstrate the ability and dexterity to manipulate the devices used in physical therapy which involves adjusting gauges, dials, small nuts/bolts, goniometers, equipment settings, tape measures, printouts, etc.		
l. Ability to administer/perform CPR and emergency first aid safely and reliably without assistance.		
m. Ability to observe and practice standard precautions.		
n. Ability to work in an environment that requires significant physical activity and mobility throughout the workday in a way that does not compromise patient, classmate or therapist safety.		
o. Ability to use arm muscles frequently and for extended periods of time		
p. Ability to use leg muscles frequently and for extended periods of time		

**2. Sensory:** The applicant must have the ability to observe and participate in demonstrations and in physical therapy treatment interventions applied to patients. This includes the ability to obtain information in classroom, laboratory or clinical settings through observation, auscultation, palpation, and other measures including but not limited to:

<b>Specific examples of essential functions for sensory</b>		<i>I am capable of meeting these requirements</i>	<i>I am not capable of meeting these requirements</i>
a.	Visual ability (corrected as necessary) to recognize and interpret facial expressions and body language, identify normal and abnormal patterns of movement, to read or set parameters on physical therapy equipment, to discriminate color changes, and to interpret and access the environment.		
b.	Visual ability (corrected as necessary) to gather information from medical records and professional literature.		
c.	Auditory ability (corrected as necessary) to recognize and respond to soft voices, auditory timers, call bells, equipment alarms, and to effectively use devices for measurement of blood pressure and breath sounds.		
d.	Ability to effectively use a telephone.		
e.	Ability to palpate a pulse and to detect changes or abnormalities of surface skin texture, skin temperature, body segment contour, muscle tone and joint movement.		
f.	Adequate and functional positional, and movement, and balance sensations to assist and safely guard (protect) patients who are walking, exercising or performing other rehabilitation activities.		

**3. Communication Skills:** The applicant must be able to utilize effective and efficient communication with peers, faculty, various clinical medical practitioners, patients and their families. This includes but is not limited to the following:

<b>Specific examples for essential functions of communication</b>		<i>I am capable of meeting these requirements</i>	<i>I am not capable of meeting these requirements</i>
a.	Ability to communicate effectively using standard English (interpret and express) both verbally and in writing. Able to correctly follow and interpret verbal instructions.		
b.	Ability to communicate effectively (interpret and express) information regarding the status, safety and rehabilitation of patients verbally and in writing		
c.	Ability to effectively and efficiently communicate verbally and in documentation with patients, families, health care professionals, community, and with reimbursement payers. Correct spelling required.		
d.	Ability to communicate and document effectively via computer or paper.		
e.	Ability to recognize, interpret and respond appropriately to nonverbal communications from patients, self and others. .		
f.	Ability to modify communications (verbal and written) to meet the needs of different audiences such as patients, families, peers, physicians and other health care personnel.		
g.	Ability to work effectively as part of an interdisciplinary team.		
h.	Ability to prepare medical documentation using prescribed format and conforming to all the rules of English punctuation, grammar, diction and style.		
i.	Ability to effectively use a computer and operate other software programs for billing, documentation or scheduling.		

j.	Ability to apply and communicate principles of logical or scientific thinking to define problems, establish facts and draw valid conclusions.		
k.	Ability to manage several abstract and concrete variables.		
l.	Ability to engage in respectful, non-judgmental interactions with individuals from various lifestyles, cultures, beliefs, races, socioeconomic classes and abilities.		
m.	Ability to develop and maintain effective, respectful working relationships with professional colleagues, peers, patients, families, and the general public.		
n.	Ability to establish trustworthy professional, empathetic relationships with individuals from a variety of backgrounds, ages and needs.		
o.	Ability to apply teaching and learning theories and methods in the healthcare and community environments.		
p.	Ability to graciously admit mistakes and accept constructive criticism.		

**4. Environmental Aspects:** The applicant must be capable and able to adhere to infection control environmental aspects as related to exposure to blood-borne pathogens.

<b>Specific examples for essential functions of the environment</b>		<i>I am capable of meeting these requirements</i>	<i>I am not capable of meeting these requirements</i>
a.	Willingness to treat patients regardless of health condition or infectious state of patient.		
b.	Ability to adhere to standard precautions.		

**5. Behavior and Psychosocial Skills:** The applicant must demonstrate good judgment, and the ability to develop empathetic and therapeutic relationships with patients and others. The applicant must have a tolerance for close and direct physical contact with a diverse population. This includes individuals of all ages, races, socioeconomic, ethnic backgrounds and a variety of people with weight disorders, physical disfigurements and medical or mental health problems. This includes but is not limited to:

<b>Specific examples for behavioral and psychosocial essential functions</b>		<i>I am capable of meeting these requirements</i>	<i>I am not capable of meeting these requirements</i>
a.	Ability to recognize and respond appropriately to potentially dangerous situations.		
b.	Ability to uphold the APTA Code of Ethics.		
c.	Ability to maintain patient confidentiality.		
d.	Ability to simultaneously work with multiple patients, families and colleagues.		
e.	Ability to work with lab partners, patients, families and others during stressful conditions, including but not limited to medically or emotionally unstable individuals, and providing CPR or other emergency interventions.		
f.	Ability to encourage cooperation and collegial relationships with classmates, instructors, other health care providers, patients and families.		
g.	Ability to prioritize multiple tasks integrates information and makes appropriate decisions.		
h.	Ability to cope with heavy workloads, patient demands and changes in schedules. Flexibility important.		
i.	Ability to practice professional and respectful physical touch across genders.		
j.	Ability to maintain professional demeanor in all clinical interactions.		

k.	Ability to interact appropriately with individuals of all ages, genders, ethnicity, socio-economic, religious and cultural backgrounds.		
l.	Ability to motivate and positively influence patients and others.		
m.	Ability to work effectively with challenging and terminally ill patients.		
n.	Ability to delegate appropriately to others.		
o.	Ability to appropriately receive direction and collaborate with supervisors, academic and clinical instructors, physicians and other designated health professionals.		
p.	Ability to consistently display professional behaviors.		

**6. Critical Thinking/Problem Solving:**

The applicant must be able to critically think and problem-solve, calculate, reason and be able to comprehend and process information within the time frame of a session of physical therapy interventions.

The applicant must be able to organize, prioritize and attend to tasks and responsibilities efficiently and effectively. This includes but is not limited to:

<b>Specific examples for critical thinking and problem solving essential functions</b>		<i>I am capable of meeting these requirements</i>	<i>I am not capable of meeting these requirements</i>
a.	Ability to collect, interpret and analyze written, verbal and observed data about patients. This requires basic math and algebra computation skills.		
b.	Ability to prioritize multiple tasks, integrate information and make appropriate decisions. Able to do this with just verbal instructions/directions if necessary.		
c.	Ability to act safely and ethically in the physical therapy classroom, lab and clinical settings.		
d.	Ability to communicate the rationale or reasoning to justify decisions made.		
e.	Ability to consult with others to clarify information and to problem solve.		
f.	Ability to recognize potentially unsafe situations and react in an appropriate and timely manner.		
g.	Ability to apply knowledge of principles, indications and contraindications for physical therapy interventions. This includes therapeutic interventions related to human pathology and disability, therapeutic modalities, therapeutic massage, pulmonary hygiene, physical and functional measures, and therapeutic exercises.		
h.	Ability to educate PTA student/learners, aides, volunteers, patients, families and caregivers.		
i.	Comprehend, retain and retrieve complex information from the liberal arts, basic sciences, mathematics, psychological sciences and clinical sciences applying that information to professional course work.		
j.	Participate in the process of scientific inquiry.		
k.	Procure evidence-based information and apply it to the practice of physical therapy.		
l.	Comprehend, synthesize and integrate information from written materials, demonstrations, lectures, class discussions, laboratory practice sessions, and real and simulated patients.		
m.	Apply information obtained from classroom, laboratory and written materials to the examination, assessment and intervention of real and simulated patients.		

Clinical education courses occur throughout the two-year program and each course increases in the number of weeks in the clinical setting starting with 4 weeks in the first fall semester, then 5 weeks in the spring and the final clinical experience is 6 weeks during the summer semester. PTAP student/learners provide physical therapy interventions in clinical settings under the direction and supervision of physical therapists. Applicants must arrange their personal schedule and can compete (40-45 hours/week) for each of these clinical courses.

Individuals with disabilities who are otherwise qualified will not be denied admission to the program, if they can perform these essential functions with reasonable accommodations. (*Individuals with Disabilities Policy*)

Applicants to the PTA Program who have questions or concerns about these requirements are encouraged to contact one of the full-time faculty members:

Professor Holly Kaiser via email: [kaiserh@mccc.edu](mailto:kaiserh@mccc.edu) or Professor Barbara Behrens via email: [behrensb@mccc.edu](mailto:behrensb@mccc.edu)

I \_\_\_\_\_ have been provided with a copy of the Essential Functions and have had the opportunity to ask  
(Initials) questions.

I \_\_\_\_\_ can perform the Essential Functions identified by the PTAP.  
(Initials)

**Please check one of these options:**

- I **need** reasonable accommodations to fully participate
- I **do not need** any accommodations to fully participate

I \_\_\_\_\_ am aware that I need to inform the PTAP Coordinator in writing if my ability to fulfill the  
(Initials) Essential Functions of a PTA requirements changes.

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Sources:

AASIG Technical Standards, Essential Functions Document. Section on Education, September, 1998.  
 Ingram, D. (1997). Opinions of Physical Therapy Program Directors on Essential Functions, *Physical Therapy*, 77(1).  
 Simmons College Essential Functions, Boston, MA. University of Rhode Island Essential Functions, Kingston, RI.  
 Northeastern University Essential Functions, Boston, MA. Illinois Central College, Peoria, IL