

# Physiotherapy vs Athletic Therapy – What is the Difference

From: The Sport Medicine Council of Manitoba Newsletter

## **What is Physiotherapy?**

A Physiotherapist is also referred to as a Physical Therapist, Physio, or P.T. for short. They are health care professionals who work in partnership with their clients and other health care providers to define, achieve, and maintain optimal health outcomes. Physiotherapists focus on improving functional independence and physical performance, preventing and managing physical impairments, disabilities and handicaps while promoting health and fitness. They are accountable for professional judgments and apply a collaborative and reasoned approach to assessment planning, intervention, and outcome evaluation. Recent advances in provincial legislation recognize Physical therapists as ‘direct access providers’. This enables clients to seek Physiotherapy without requiring a referral from their Physician. Services are often covered by many health care plans.

Physiotherapists are employed in a variety of settings including; hospitals, private clinics, rehabilitation centers, schools, community agencies, professional and local sports teams, nursing homes and home care. Patient populations vary greatly from premature neonates to the elderly, and many involve a variety of conditions. Examples include; cardio respiratory, orthopedic, neurodevelopment, head injury, spinal cord injury, oncology, obstetrics, rheumatology, neurology, amputations, burns, congenital anomalies, palliative and intensive care, health promotion, and work hardening. Those who have been injured in a motor vehicle or work related accidents may require intervention from a Physical Therapist. Many Physical Therapists also work with athletes and sports teams to provide medical coverage for those organizations requesting their services.

In the 1980’s, a postgraduate education program was established to promote the specialty of Sports Physiotherapy. Physiotherapists who chose to specialize in the area of sports have the opportunity to undergo further training in this program which involves 3 levels under the National organization called Sport Physiotherapy Canada. Level 1 requires a Physiotherapist to certify in CPR and First Aid. This provides the basic emergency skill requirements to begin safe on-field coverage that is necessary when working with athletes of all ages and abilities. The Certificate (Level 2) is attained upon successful completion of the curriculum which involves 200 documented hours of fieldwork, in at least 2 different sports – one of which must be a contact sport. However, 800 hours are suggested prior to attempting exams to achieve this level. The exam is both written and practical and covers; emergency care, taping, protective equipment, return to sport testing, and sport massage. Successful completion of this level allows the therapist to cover events independently. To achieve the Diploma (Level 3) in Sports Physiotherapy, an additional 200 to 800 hours of practical sports experience is required as well as studies in pharmacology, exercise physiology and prescription, advanced taping and sports medicine. Again, a written and practical exam is required to successfully complete this level and qualify to work with National and International sports teams, act as Chief Therapist for Canadian medical teams, or as site coordinator for international events held in Canada such as the Pan American or Olympic Games.

## **What is Athletic Therapy?**

Athletic Therapy is a profession that specializes in the prevention and care of musculoskeletal disorders (muscles, bones, joints) especially as they relate to athletics and the pursuit of physical activity.

An Athletic Therapist is a certified member of the Canadian Athletic Therapists Association (CATA). The letters CAT© after the therapist's name designates a Certified Athletic Therapist (Canada). The CATA was originally founded in 1965 under the name Canadian Athletic Trainers Association. In 1975, the Association became the Canadian Athletic Therapists Association (CATA) to reflect the more appropriate image of the professional therapist. That year marked the first year that the certification process was first implemented.

The CATA has always been at the forefront of the Canadian sport medicine community. Over the years the CATA has grown in credibility and professional status to become widely recognized throughout the general health care community.

An athletic Therapist is dedicated to providing services to the active individual that includes the prevention, immediate care, and ongoing rehabilitation of those injuries.

Prevention includes musculoskeletal and postural evaluation, warm-up, conditioning programs, prophylactic or supportive taping, equipment selection, fitting and repair, and adapting the individual to the activity, environment, and facilities.

The immediate care of the athletic injuries by a Certified Athletic Therapist includes injury assessment, basic emergency life support, recognition and management of acute traumatic neurological dysfunction, provision of first aid, preparation for entrance into appropriate health care delivery systems, and utilization of techniques to facilitate a safe return to participation. A Certified Athletic Therapist utilizes contemporary rehabilitative techniques, therapeutic modalities, physical; reconditioning, and supportive strapping procedures to promote an environment conducive to optimal healing in preparing the individual for safe reintegration into an active lifestyle.

In cooperation with all performance enhancement personnel and members of the health care delivery team, the Athletic Therapist is an integral part of a total service to maximize the performance and welfare of the individual. Concomitant with the execution of their role, the Athletic Therapist nurtures an attitude positive health.

An individual who wishes to certify as an Athletic Therapist must attend a degree from an accredited institution. In order to write the certification examination, candidates must be members in good standing of the CATA and their Provincial organization; have completed their degree; and a 1200-hour internship program.

The internship is divided into 600 hours of clinical and 600 hours of on-field experience. Clinical placements include experience in assessment, planning rehabilitation programs, utilizing therapeutic modalities, and exercise prescription to return the patient to a full and active lifestyle. On field placements provide experience in pre-event procedures and immediate care of injuries.

Once candidates have completed all 1200 internship hours, hold a valid CPR and First Aid Certificate, and have written support from their supervisor, they are eligible to write a 3-hour comprehensive exam. A minimum score of 70% is required to pass. When candidates successfully pass the written theory, then they qualify to take the Practical exam held three times a year. The Practical exam is a 3-hour exam divided into Assessment Techniques, Rehabilitation Principles, Therapeutic Modalities, Taping Techniques, and Emergency Care. Successful candidates earn the right to the title of Certified Athletic Therapist (Canada) or CAT©.