

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS<sup>1</sup> About PHYSIOTHERAPY\* ENTRY-LEVEL EDUCATION

In June 2001, Canadian physiotherapy educators, regulators, accreditors of education programs and the professional association released a statement about physiotherapy entry-level education that is summarized as follows:

*The preferred entry-level educational qualification for Canadian physiotherapists, to practise physiotherapy, is a “professional master’s” degree.*

*By 2010, or sooner, Canadian universities will offer entry-level education programs in physiotherapy only at the level of a “professional master’s” degree.*

It is anticipated that by 2010 a professional master’s degree will be the entry-level degree for new physiotherapists educated in Canada. The result of years of consultation and study, the decision to move to a professional master’s is an important one for physiotherapy in Canada.

### 1. Why are the “entry-level” requirements for physiotherapists changing?

The changing health care environment and advances in the science of physiotherapy indicated that a different approach to the delivery of physiotherapy education programs was necessary.

The move to the “professional master’s” degree was made by the educational programs to better align the educational credentials with the knowledge, skills and abilities required of physiotherapists in the provision of physiotherapy to Canadians.

Specifically, the reasons include:

- The required competencies to effectively meet the physiotherapy needs of Canadians have expanded in number and complexity over the last decade.
- The large growth of information in the sciences, social sciences and other fields of research that applies to the education and practice of physiotherapists.
- Physiotherapists are now regulated autonomous health care practitioners throughout Canada.
- The healthcare environment has become increasingly less institutionalized with a shift from hospital department services to program management service delivery, increased community-based service delivery and increased services in rural areas.
- Many more physiotherapists are working independently in remote, rural and urban settings and are caring for clients with more acute, complex conditions. In addition to

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the website of the school of rehabilitation science at the University of British Columbia <http://www.rehab.ubc.ca/> and *On the Move*. Newsletter of the Department of Physical Therapy at the University of Alberta, Edmonton AB Vol. 1, Issue 4, May 2001.

\* Physiotherapy, physiotherapist, physical therapy, physical therapist, physiothérapeute, physiothérapie, PT, and pht are official marks used with permission. The terms physiotherapy and physiotherapist are considered synonyms for physical therapy and physical therapist respectively and will be used interchangeably in this document.

clinical competencies, entry-level practitioners need: effective strategies for independent practice, program development and management skills, the ability to make evidence-based decisions and evaluate outcomes on an individual and program basis. Other factors that influenced the decision to change:

- Many students in physiotherapy programs have one or more degrees prior to entering the physiotherapy field.
- The interest in equity of educational credentials with related health care professionals (e.g. occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists) and international peers (e.g. physiotherapists in Australia, United States).
- An increasing number of programs required a pre-requisite bachelor's degree to be admitted to the professional bachelor's degree program.

After some programs changed their degree to the “professional master’s,” the number of applicants for those physiotherapy programs that hadn’t changed their degree decreased

### **2. Who decided to change the educational credential to a “professional master’s” degree?**

Physiotherapy educators in Canada have studied this issue over the past five years. The curriculum for physiotherapy education was continuing to change and progress to meet the changing needs of the health environment.

By spring of 2001, three out of the thirteen university physiotherapy programs in Canada had implemented plans for a professional master's degree. Similar decisions were being considered in many of the other universities across Canada.

### **3. Who set the 2010 target date for all physiotherapy educational programs?**

The many stakeholders in physiotherapy – the educators, the professional association, the accreditors of physiotherapy education and the physiotherapy regulators – set the 2010 target. The consensus was that a single common educational credential, *the professional master's degree*, was the appropriate educational credential for physiotherapists educated in Canada.

While the educational programs led the debate and made their initial decisions individually, it soon became evident that all stakeholders involved in the development and regulation of the physiotherapy profession needed to consider this important issue. A discussion paper was written and a consensus meeting held involving all university programs, physiotherapy regulators, the professional association and university program accreditors. The result was agreement among all stakeholders that all university physiotherapy programs will work towards offering a *professional master's* degree in physiotherapy by 2010.

### **4. How does a “professional master’s” degree differ from the master’s degree currently offered through the different rehabilitation schools?**

The professional master's prepares the student for clinical practice as a physiotherapist.

Other master's degrees are research focused where the student investigates a specific area of interest.

### **5. Will graduates of the new programs all be researchers and managers?**

The new professional master's programs will graduate students eligible to apply for licensure as a physiotherapist. Graduates will be eligible to apply for the same positions filled by new graduates of the current bachelor's degree programs.

### **6. Will a physiotherapist with a professional master's degree be paid more than a physiotherapist with a bachelor's degree?**

There is no reason to suggest that physiotherapists who have the same licence to practise should be paid differently based on the type of educational credential used to gain that license. Generally, job responsibilities and experience determine remuneration. Licensed physiotherapists with professional master's degree or a bachelor's degree will have similar job responsibilities.

### **7. If a professional master's program is shorter than the bachelor's degree, how will all of the necessary content be covered?**

The curriculum guidelines<sup>3</sup> and competency documents<sup>4</sup> accepted nationally, as well as the accreditation standards,<sup>5</sup> will continue to guide the professional master's programs. The development of strong, broad-based clinical skills will continue to be an important aspect of the physiotherapy education.

Admission to professional master's programs will require a bachelor's degree in a related health science program. Some of the general course content, like physiology, anatomy or psychology, will now be part of the pre-requisite (i.e. bachelor's) degree. Shifting general course content to the prerequisite bachelor's degree will allow the professional master's program to focus on the development of the physiotherapy-specific knowledge, skills and abilities.

### **8. Will the accreditation standards for professional master's programs be different from those for bachelor's degree programs?**

The university physiotherapy accreditation standards apply to "entry-level" education programs and are applicable regardless of the degree being awarded.

The Accreditation Council for Canadian Physiotherapy Academic Programs (ACCPAP) is closely monitoring changes in the "entry-level" education on an ongoing basis to ensure that the accreditation standards are appropriate to evaluate the physiotherapy educational programs.

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<sup>3</sup> The Council of Directors of Physical Therapy Academic Programs and the Canadian Physiotherapy Association, *Entry-Level Curriculum for Canadian Physical Therapy Programs: Guidelines for Faculty*, Toronto ON, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> The Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators, Canadian Physiotherapy Association, Canadian University Physical Therapy Academic Council, *Competency Profile for the Entry-level Physiotherapist in Canada*, Toronto, ON, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Accreditation Council of Canadian Physiotherapy Academic Programs, *Accreditation Standards for Canadian Physiotherapy Academic Programs*, London, ON, 2002.

**9. Will there be fewer physiotherapists graduating?**

It is anticipated that in Canada the same number of physiotherapy students will graduate. What is not known is if additional physiotherapy students are necessary to meet the future physiotherapy needs of Canadians.

**10. Will the move to a professional master's affect the number of applicants?**

It is not anticipated that the move to a professional master's degree will affect the overall number of qualified applicants. Currently, the physiotherapy educational programs have many more qualified applicants than they can accept. The majority of current physiotherapy students have a bachelor's degree. Some also have a master's degree prior to entering the physiotherapy program. Many others have two or three years of post-secondary education before being accepted into the program.

**11. Will practising physiotherapists in Canada be required to obtain a master's degree in order to work?**

No, as licensed physiotherapists have already met entry-level educational qualifications.

The minimal licensure requirement for physiotherapists will continue to be an equivalent degree to the bachelor's degree in physiotherapy.

**12. What is the impact on internationally educated physiotherapists wanting to start to work in Canada?**

The minimal licensure requirement for physiotherapists – *educated in Canada or internationally educated* - will continue to be an equivalent entry-level degree in physiotherapy.

**13. How can practising physiotherapists obtain a master's degree if they choose to do so?**

The option for obtaining a "research master's" degree will continue to be available should that degree be more appropriate for a physiotherapist's planned career path.

If a practising physiotherapist wishes to earn a professional master's degree, some universities plan to develop and offer "bridging" programs to make that possible. There will be no requirement for physiotherapists who are already licensed to obtain a master's degree as they already have met entry-level educational qualifications.

**14. What if I need more information about this?**

For more information, about the National Physiotherapy Advisory Group or physiotherapy entry-level education, see the contact information in Appendix 2.

**Appendix 1  
Vision for Entry-Level Education for Physiotherapists<sup>6</sup> in Canada**

Physiotherapy is an essential and fundamental element of health services for Canadians.

The health services environment and needs of Canadians continue to change in complexity. The physiotherapy profession is responsive to this change, as well as other change factors including new knowledge, advances in technology, and an increasing variety of practice settings. As physiotherapy practice is evolving, the required knowledge, skills and behaviours of physiotherapists are increasing in complexity. As a result, it is critical that the education of entry-level physiotherapists in Canada also evolves to ensure that physiotherapy graduates are able to meet the challenges of the future.

University programs, regulators, accreditors of education programs and the professional association each have related yet distinct roles in entry-level education for physiotherapists. Delegates from these groups met together in June 2001 to discuss a preferred vision for entry-level physiotherapy education in Canada. The following summarizes the consensus reached:

**The preferred entry-level educational qualification for Canadian physiotherapists, to practise physiotherapy, is a professional master's degree<sup>7</sup>.**

**By 2010, or sooner, Canadian universities will offer entry-level education programs in physiotherapy only at the level of a professional's master's degree.**

Presently, Canadian universities offer entry-level education programs in physiotherapy at either a bachelor's degree or a professional master's level. The preferred future, however, will be a professional master's degree. The transition will occur at all Canadian university physiotherapy programs, as they are able to design and implement quality entry-level professional master's degree programs.

University programs, regulators, accreditors of education programs and the professional association will work collaboratively to achieve this vision.

The next step to realize this vision will be to consult further with the physiotherapy community, while continuing to offer quality physiotherapy services to Canadians.

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<sup>6</sup> The terms physiotherapist and physical therapist and physiotherapy and physical therapy are considered synonyms and can be used interchangeably.

<sup>7</sup> A professional master's degree is a master's degree that is conferred upon completion of an education program that prepares the graduate to practice as an entry-level physiotherapist.

# ***National Physiotherapy Advisory Group***

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## **Appendix 2**

### **NATIONAL PHYSIOTHERAPY ADVISORY GROUP**

**NPAG-** Cathryn Beggs, Chair, NPAG, c/o ACCPAP

**Accreditation Council for Canadian Physiotherapy Academic Programs (ACCPAP)**

Suite 26, 509 Commissioners Rd W., London, ON N6J 1Y5, Phone 519.641.6883, Facsimile 519.472.3119

**Canadian Alliance of *Physiotherapy* Regulators (The Alliance)**

1243 Islington Ave, Suite 501, Toronto, ON, M8X 1V9, Phone 416.234.8800, Facsimile 416.234.8820

**Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA)**

2345 Yonge St., Suite 410, Toronto, ON, M4P 2E5, Phone 416.932.1888, Facsimile 416.932.9708

**Canadian Universities Physical Therapy Academic Council (CUPAC)**

c/o U of Montréal, Faculté de médecine, École de réadaptation C. P. 6128, Succursale Centre-ville, Montreal, QC H3C 3J7, Ph 514.343.5934, Fax 514.343.2105