

Alliance policy on the use of the Physiotherapy Competency Exam for non-entry-to-practice
Approved December 3, 2014

Background

The Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators (The Alliance) has been delegated the task of evaluating physiotherapy candidates to assess entry-level competency. On behalf of all physiotherapy regulators with the exception of Quebec, The Alliance administers the Physiotherapy Competency Examination (PCE) to determine a candidate's readiness for safe, effective, and independent physiotherapy practice. This is done through the successful completion of the written and clinical components of the national competency exam.

The written component of the PCE is a 200-question multiple choice/best answer exam assessing knowledge, skills and abilities of the minimally competent entry-level physiotherapist. It is based on a blueprint that combines questions on four areas of practice (neurological, neuro-muskulo-skeletal, cardio-respiratory and multi-systems) with 3 functional areas (1) assessment and evaluation; 2) interpretation, planning, treatment, and re-evaluation; and 3) professional responsibilities). The blueprint is based on a practice analysis completed with the whole profession across Canada about every 5 years.

From time to time, The Alliance receives requests from its member regulators to allow a physiotherapist to take the PCE for non-entry-to-practice reasons. Most often, this happens when a regulator needs evidence of readiness to re-enter practice after a period of time away. However, in a recent case, one regulator's disciplinary committee ordered a registered physiotherapist to take the PCE as one part of a judgement against inappropriate behaviour in practice (i.e., as a punishment, not for assessment purposes).

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to clarify appropriate uses of the physiotherapy competency exam outside of its primary use for pre-licensure assessment of readiness for entry-to-practice.

Scope:

This policy applies to all ten regulatory Colleges in Canada plus Yukon and to all physiotherapists registered with one of the Colleges.

Principles:

1. The Alliance serves its regulator members and conducts its business in the public interest,
2. The PCE is the intellectual property of The Alliance. It has been copyrighted and all parts of the exam, including the item bank and all exam forms belong to The Alliance. As The Alliance's primary intellectual capital, it is the responsibility of The Alliance to ensure the security and integrity of the PCE,
3. One component of maintaining the exam's integrity is protecting it from over-exposure, in particular for reasons other than its initial purpose, or to individuals who are not legitimate candidates for physiotherapy licensure,
4. A core component of the validity of the PCE as a high-stakes screening tool is "fitness for purpose." That is – that the exam is not used for reasons apart from its initial stated aim – the assessment of knowledge, abilities and skills of the minimally competent physiotherapist.
5. An additional component of fitness for purpose relates to the comprehensiveness of the exam. The PCE is mapped against a blueprint covering a broad spectrum of clinical areas and functional capabilities. Its purpose, therefore, is related to assessment of the full spectrum of physiotherapy competency. It is not the intention or purpose of the exam to assess one narrow or limited component of competency (e.g., ethics or compliance with standards or research skills) and it is not valid for this purpose.

Policy:

The purpose of the Physiotherapy Competency Exam (PCE) is to assess a physiotherapy candidate's competency for entry-to-practice. In select circumstances, and with permission of The Alliance, the exam may also be used to assess the competence (knowledge, abilities and skills) of already- or recently-licensed physiotherapists returning to practice. Physiotherapists who are currently registered with a provincial regulatory authority in a practising category are not eligible to write the PCE for any reason.