

# PTA Advanced Proficiency Pathways (APP)

APTA is proud to introduce Advanced Proficiency Pathways (PTA APPs) for the physical therapist assistant (PTA)!

The Physical Therapist Assistant Advanced Proficiency Pathways (PTA APPs) are educational guides to help the licensed PTA gain advanced proficiency knowledge and skill in a selected area of work. Using the PTA APPs, participants take online core courses common to all of the APPs; content specific courses for the selected area of work; and mentoring experiences with a qualified mentor of the participant's choosing. A dedicated program mentor at APTA makes sure that participants stay on the pathway and arrive at advanced proficiency as efficiently as possible.

The Advanced Proficiency Pathways are career boosters that help PTAs move from novice knowledge and skill to advanced proficiency in the physical therapy area of choice. The program has 3 components:

1. APTA courses that are completed regardless of area of proficiency with knowledge checks.
2. Proficiency area-specific content with knowledge/skill checks.
3. Mentored clinical experiences with skills checks.

Participants receive guidance by a program mentor and a clinical mentor that has expertise in the content area.

Initial content areas include:

- Acute Care
- Cardiopulmonary
- Geriatric
- Oncology
- Pediatrics
- Wound Management

Additional content areas will be added as they are completed.

## About the PTA Advanced Proficiency Pathways (APP) Program

Information about the [PTA Advanced Proficiency Pathways \(APP\) Program](#).

### Background

In March 2009, the APTA Board of Directors (Board) voted to establish a task force that includes physical therapist assistants, to determine appropriate post entry-level educational pathways in light of APTA positions, standards, guidelines, policies, and procedures, and other appropriate APTA documents, with an interim report to the June 2010 Board of Directors Meeting and a final report to the June 2011 Board of Directors Meeting. (B of D 03/2009, V -14).

The Board appointed six members (three physical therapists and 3 physical therapist assistants to the Educational Pathways of the Physical Therapist Assistant Task Force (Task Force). The Task Force developed the Advanced Proficiency Pathway Program to fulfill this charge.

## Purpose

The purposes of the APTA Advanced Proficiency Pathways (APP) Program for the Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) are to:

- Provide PTAs with clearly defined post-graduation educational curriculum that leads to advanced proficiency in a selected area of physical therapy (eg, geriatrics, pediatrics, wound management).
- Promote PTAs career development by providing a self-initiated curriculum completion process that strengthens the PT/PTA working relationship and encourages life-long learning.
- Assist physical therapists, employers, consumers, the health care community, and others in identifying PTAs with advanced knowledge and skill in a specified area of physical therapy.

## Nature of the Advanced Proficiency Pathways Program

The Advanced Proficiency Pathways are post-graduation curricula designed to increase the participants' knowledge and skill in a chosen area of physical therapy and consist of:

- Core group of courses with knowledge exams that are common to all of the Advanced Proficiency Pathways;
- Content-specific courses (eg, geriatric, cardiopulmonary, pediatric) with knowledge exams that have been developed by clinical experts; and
- Mentored clinical experiences with skill checks.

The didactic component reinforces previously gained knowledge and provides additional content that is not found in most entry-level PTA programs. The mentoring component assures skill practice and demonstration to assure mastery of the psychomotor component of the curriculum. Participants are required to pass all examinations that are integrated throughout the curriculum including knowledge examinations that follow most of the courses in the curriculum and skill examinations that are a required component of the content-specific courses. There is no final comprehensive examination.

Participants in the program work with a support team to assure best outcomes and completion of the AP Pathways. The support team includes:

- A mentor from the AP Program (MAPP) is a contact with APTA who helps participants negotiate the clinical pathways to advanced proficiency by providing guidance regarding next steps and troubleshooting when problems occur.
- Each participant will select a clinical mentor, a physical therapist that has content expertise and has accepted responsibility for teaching and guiding the PTA through the clinical education component of the curriculum.
- The PTA's supervising physical therapist in his/her place of employment is also part of the support team and may also function as the clinical mentor when appropriate and qualified.

Physical therapist assistants who meet all of the requirements for their selected pathway will be recognized for completion of the advanced proficiency pathway within their selected area of physical therapy. The recognition is for ten years. The recipient will receive a certificate suitable for framing, a lapel pin, and formal recognition via participation in APTA's Annual Honors and Awards Celebration and announcements in APTA publications.

## Prerequisite Requirements

To start an Advanced Proficiency Pathway (APP), participants must demonstrate:

1. Licensure and/or graduate of an accredited PTA program
2. APTA membership
3. Successful completion of prerequisite courses:
  - [Leading the Team: A Practical Guide to Working with PTAs](#)
  - [Professionalism Module 1: Introduction to Professionalism](#)
4. Supporting letters of reference from supervising physical therapist and clinical mentor

## Program Requirements

Participants must apply for enrollment in the Advanced Proficiency Pathway of their choice by [submitting a completed APP Enrollment Application](#).

Each Advanced Proficiency Pathway includes:

- 60 contact hours of selected continuing education courses that meet the defined guidelines and content of the APP, including: APTA "core" courses and selected content courses or equivalent APTA approved courses.
- Mentored clinical experiences (see mentor requirements below) with the supervising physical therapist and clinical mentor.
- 2,000 clinical hours of work experience in the content area.
- Successful completion of all competency-based assessments, including: knowledge assessment via course examinations and skill assessment via skill checks by the clinical mentor.

The didactic or knowledge curriculum of every clinical Advanced Proficiency Pathway includes:

- Development of advanced clinical skills and clinical problem solving in the realm of interventions and related data collection that are: specific to the population and types of pathologies seen in the area of physical therapy, consistent with current evidence, inclusive of patient/caregiver/family education; and include instruction in fitness, wellness, and prevention.
- Development of advanced personal and professional values as defined in APTA's Values-based behaviors.
- Development of advanced personal and professional skills in advocacy, leadership, and mentorship; preparing the participant to be a leader in the profession.
- Development of advanced skills in PT-PTA collaboration, including communication and documentation.

## Mentor Requirements

Mentoring, a critical component of the Advanced Proficiency Pathways, is included to assure that participants are able to access and discuss the evidence; and apply the problem solving, clinical skills, and values-based skills that are developed and enhanced through the APP. Participants are responsible to recruit their clinical mentor and should follow the following guidelines when selecting a clinical mentor. The clinical mentor and supervising physical therapist can be the same person provided that the supervising physical therapist has the required skills to serve as a clinical mentor. APTA staff will select a program mentor (MAPP) for each participant.

The primary clinical mentor is a physical therapist that has demonstrated competency in the content area and has accepted responsibility for teaching and guiding the PTA through the clinical education component of the curriculum. Other clinical mentors may be physical therapists, PTAs, and other healthcare providers identified by the primary clinical mentor who have demonstrated competency in the content area.

Clinical mentoring: The provision of clinical instruction and feedback to the PTA until the PTA is able to perform the new intervention or behavior independently; and is provided by a clinician who is competent in the intervention and demonstrates professional/value-based behaviors.

## PTA Advanced Proficiency Pathways (APP) Enrollment Process

Prior to submitting an enrollment application for admission into an Advanced Proficiency Pathway (APP), prospective applicants must complete the following APTA courses:

- [Leading the Team: A Practical Guide to Working with PTAs](#)
- [Professionalism Module 1: Introduction to Professionalism](#)

All courses are available online at the [APTA Learning Center](#).

### Enrollment Application Submission

Enrollment applications are due March 1, June 1, September 1, or December 1. (Enrollment applications will not be processed until the application fee has been received.)

Application information includes the following:

- [Enrollment form \(.doc\)](#)
- Contact and background information
- Selected Advanced Proficiency Pathway (APP)
- Brief description of work experience in selected APP from the past 5 years, if any
- Description of continuing education in selected APP from the past 5 years, if any
- [Letter of reference and partnering agreement from a supervising physical therapist \(.doc\)](#)
- [Letter of reference, resume, and partnering agreement from selected clinical mentor \(.doc\)](#)
- Copies of the certificates of completion of the prerequisite courses: Advanced Proficiency Pathways for the PTA: A Program Overview, Introduction to Professionalism, and Ethics.

Applicants may submit their completed enrollment application (by the due date) and nonrefundable application fee of \$135 by:

- E-mailing the completed application to [pta@apta.org](mailto:pta@apta.org) or faxing the completed application to 703/706-8519 and calling Member Services at 800/999-2782 to make electronic payment; or
- Mailing the completed application and a check payable to:

APTA  
PTA Services Department  
PO Box 75701  
Baltimore, MD 21275-5701

**Important:** You must include your APTA member number and "PTA APP Fee" on the check's memo line.

Progress is documented on the [Advanced Proficiency Pathways Worksheet \(.doc\)](#).