

COLLEGE OF PHYSICAL THERAPISTS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

PRACTICE STANDARD

Number 9

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COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

Definition

Complementary and alternative therapies (CATs): A diverse range of health care practices falling within both health promotion and therapeutic treatment for a variety of chronic and acute illnesses, pain management and palliative care. CATs include practices and ideas defined by their users as preventing or treating illness or promoting health or well-being. Boundaries between the CATs domain and the domain of the traditional system are not always sharp or fixed.

Introduction

CATs differ from conventional physical therapy treatment practices because they are generally unproven. When a CAT undergoes rigorous testing, for example in a controlled and randomized trial, then the results dictate whether the alternative treatment becomes conventional treatment, whether the unorthodox becomes accepted, and whether the unproven becomes proven. Assertions, speculations, and testimonials do not substitute for scientific evidence.

Some physical therapists use complementary and alternative therapies (CATs) in the treatment of their patients. The College considers CATs to be therapeutic options that may be used in addition to more commonly used conventional therapeutic interventions within the scope of physical therapy practice.

Standard Statement

When CATs fall within the scope of practice of physical therapy, registrants may offer them as physical therapy services. Physical therapists providing CATs must adhere to and maintain the same standards of practice that apply to any other activity that is within the scope of practice of physical therapy.

Performance Expectations

1. The physical therapist must ensure that the treatment approach of the CAT maintains the standard of practice of the College. This includes:
 - undertaking a physical therapy assessment of the patient prior to explaining options for intervention;
 - offering all conventional physical therapy treatment plan options in addition to CATs. Providing CATs only within a patient-centred approach that involves discussion and consideration of the patient's treatment goals;
 - ensuring respect for the patient's right to choose during the process of obtaining informed consent. Ensuring the patient is aware when a treatment option is considered a CAT; and
 - ensuring that the risk of harm to the patient is minimized.

2. The physical therapist must evaluate the CAT to determine if the treatment(s) can be provided within the scope of practice of physical therapy. If the physical therapist determines the CAT cannot be provided as part of the physical therapy treatment plan, they must inform the patient.
3. The physical therapist must select appropriate CATs using an evidence-based approach that evaluates evidence relevant to the patient's presenting problem/condition.
4. The physical therapist practice CATs in accordance with the *Health Professions Act*, the regulations under these acts, and any other relevant legislation or regulations.
5. The physical therapist must inform the patient and/or the payer as to whether the CAT under consideration will incur an additional cost to the patient and/or the payer.
6. The physical therapist must be competent in the performance of the CAT being provided.

Additional Resources:

College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC. Resource manual for physicians. Complementary and alternative therapies. CPSBC website [cited 2007 Oct 11]; Available from: URL: https://www.cpsbc.ca/cps/physician_resources/publications/resource_manual/complementaryalternative.

College of Physiotherapists of Ontario. Standards for professional practice. Complementary and alternative therapies. January 2007. CPT website [cited 2007 Oct 11]; Available from: URL: <http://www.collegept.org/college/content/pdf/en/guide07/III.B.4.Complementary.pdf>.

College of Physiotherapists of Ontario. Standards for professional practice. Guide to the standard for complementary and alternative therapies. 2005. CPT website [cited 2007 Oct 11]; Available from: URL: http://www.collegept.org/college/content/pdf/en/guide07/III.B.5.Complementary_Therapies_Guide..pdf.

For information on informed consent see the *Health Care (Consent) and Care Facility (Admission) Act* at www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/stat/H/96181_01.htm and the *Infant's Act* at www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/stat/I/96223_01.htm.

Acknowledgement:

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