

Federation Develops a Coursework Tool for PTAs

The Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy has developed, validated and adopted a coursework tool for the purpose of designating substantial equivalency to the entry-level education of the physical therapist assistant.

Medicare's definition of PTA spurs the development of a PTA coursework tool

The 2008 Medicare/Medicaid regulations (CMS 1385-FC) include a new definition of PTA which states, "...if educated outside of the US or trained in the US military, graduated from an education program determined to be substantially equivalent to physical therapist assistant entry level education in the US by a credentials evaluation organization approved by the American Physical Therapy Association or identified at 8 CFR 212.15 (e)."

In response to this regulation, FSBPT developed and validated a tool for PTA substantial equivalency, the *Coursework Tool for Foreign Educated Physical Therapist Assistants (PTA Tool 2007)*. The FSBPT Board of Directors adopted the PTA Tool 2007 for use in September 2008. It was introduced at the annual meeting in a presentation by the Foreign Educated Standards Committee.

Other countries have developed PTA-equivalent programs

In the past few years, other countries have developed the role of the PTA and educational programs for physical therapist assistants. For instance, in Canada there are at least 20 PTA programs and an accrediting process is being developed; there are also a few programs scattered throughout Europe and the Middle East.

US PT education is at the clinical doctorate level

As US PT education moves toward the clinical doctorate, there is a greater and greater division between the professional training of US PTs and the technical preparation of other physical therapy practitioners worldwide. Especially in the less developed areas of the

world, there are limited resources for education but a great need for technical care providers. These post-secondary programs seem to match the elements of the PTA education more closely than the DPT.

Some US jurisdictions currently license foreign graduates as PTAs

A number of US jurisdictions currently license or register foreign graduates as PTAs. In 2007, 200 foreign PT graduates were allowed to sit for the PTA exam. There does not seem to be any consistent tool for determining equivalency of the foreign-educated at the PTA level. The *PTA Tool 2007* provides an opportunity to implement some equivalency standards in the US.

How the PTA Tool 2007 was developed

PTA Tool 2007 was developed by an FSBPT taskforce and validated for content against the CAPTE *Evaluative Criteria for the Accreditation of Education Programs for the Preparation of Physical Therapist Assistants*, adopted April 2006 and effective July 1, 2007. The language and definitions used in *PTA Tool 2007*, are matched to the *Normative Model of PTA Education; Version 2007*. The tool was tested by individual evaluators and then field tested with actual documents by a group of experienced evaluators who also have had experience in faculty roles at US PTA programs. FSBPT is currently piloting some initial reviews to gather additional information on possible scenarios for implementation.

Use of PTA Tool 2007

Licensing boards will actually be the "deciders" on how to use the *PTA Tool 2007* in their jurisdiction; e.g., they will decide who is qualified to be evaluated for licensure or registration using *PTA Tool 2007*. The Foreign Education Standards Committee is developing recommendations to assist jurisdictions in their decision. They are working hard to provide those recommendations to the jurisdictions in a timely manner. ■

The PTA Tool 2007 cannot be used for USCIS health care certification as this certification requires a BS degree equivalency. PTA entry-level education is an associate degree with two years of study.