

Section 3: Definition and Description of the Sports Physiotherapist

3.1 Sports Physiotherapist: A Definition

A sports physiotherapist is a recognised professional who demonstrates advanced competencies in the promotion of safe physical activity participation, provision of advice, and adaptation of rehabilitation and training interventions, for the purposes of preventing injury, restoring optimal function, and contributing to the enhancement of sports performance, in athletes of all ages and abilities¹, while ensuring a high standard of professional and ethical practice.

3.2 Sports Physiotherapist: A Description

Sports physiotherapists are professionals who aspire to work at master's level². Sports physiotherapists work with athletes of all ages and abilities, at individual and group levels, to prevent injury, restore optimal function and contribute to the enhancement of sports performance, using sports-specific knowledge, skills and attitudes to achieve best clinical practice.

Sports physiotherapists are pioneers in their field, critically challenging and evaluating practice, developing new knowledge through research, and disseminating this understanding to initiate changes in practice.

In their role as a professional leader, sports physiotherapists influence their professional and multidisciplinary cultures by keeping up to date with new innovations, incorporating them into education, and creating a professional environment that enables the implementation of best practice. They aim to promote safe participation in physical activity, and the sports physiotherapy profession, to the wider community and facilitate international mobility of therapists through education and practice.

Sports Physiotherapists incorporate knowledge and understanding of innovations into the roles they play as advisors at several levels – as case managers (micro level), in service delivery (meso level), and in their influences on policy change (macro level).

At the heart of sports physiotherapists' thinking and behaviour lies understanding of and sensitivity towards the implications of injury for the athlete and the impact on others around them. They maintain independence in their decision-making, ensuring their duty of care to the athlete in a context of many potential conflicts of interest.

1: the description "all ages and abilities" includes specific population groups, for example, children, adolescents, and older people, as well as individuals with impairments that limit their participation. It also describes the difference in sporting ability, from recreational to competitive at different levels.

2: See appendix 2 for a description of master's level. It should be noted that sports physiotherapists have the foundational competencies developed through an undergraduate physiotherapy degree. Work at a master's level is viewed as the threshold level for specialisation in sports physiotherapy. It is recognised that some professionals will progress to PhD and clinical doctorate levels.

Section 4: Sports Physiotherapy Competencies and Standards

The process of developing the competencies and standards has been described in section 2. Competencies have been written for sub-roles within the different roles illustrated in figure 3. This has led to the development of eleven statements regarding the competencies expected of sports physiotherapists. Standards have been developed to supplement each competency description. These are specific behaviours that indicate the minimum level of achievement for each competency.

The first competencies and standards presented are those relating specifically to the overarching role: Manager of the Patient/Client. This role interlinks with the sports physiotherapist's activities as Advisor, Professional Leader, and Innovator; competencies falling into these three categories are presented next. Finally, competencies and standards are presented that relate to the overlaps between broad roles as Innovator, Professional Leader and Advisor.

Both competencies and standards incorporate flexibility for international variation. A space is provided within each competency and its related standards to allow any relevant statements regarding specific national interpretations.