

Comparison of U.S. Education and Training for Physiatrists and Other Healthcare Providers

With the increase in non-physician efforts to expand their scope of practice and practice authority through legislation, exemplified by the widespread use of the term Doctor by non-physicians, patients may believe that they are receiving care from a physician (Doctor of Medicine or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine) even when this is not the case. This resource aims to clarify the difference in U.S. education and training for physiatrists and common professions in healthcare that use the term “Doctor.”

The American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (AAPM&R) believes that physiatry-led, patient-centered, team-based care is the best approach to providing optimized rehabilitation care for patients. This approach ensures the health and safety of patients and maintains the high quality of care standard set by PM&R physicians. The specialized, multidisciplinary training of a PM&R physician makes them the most qualified specialist to lead the team of medical specialists, therapists, and practitioners involved in a patient’s rehabilitative care. AAPM&R will continue to support efforts to improve truth in advertising for the provision of physical medicine and rehabilitation services and has provided this resource for members to use in their local advocacy efforts.

Please Note: This information is compiled from various sources. It includes general differences among physicians and other health care providers and is not intended to be comprehensive.

	Physiatrist (M.D. or D.O.)	Physician Assistant (PA)	Nurse Practitioner (NP)	Physical Therapist (DPT)	Chiropractor (DC)
Undergraduate Education	4 Years – B.A. or B.S.	4 Years – B.A. or B.S. and clinical hours (for most)	4 Years – B.S. in Nursing (some exceptions) and clinical hours	4 Years – B.A. or B.S. is highly recommended	90 semester hours of undergraduate education
Entrance Exam	Medical College Admissions test (MCAT)	Graduate Record Examination (GRE) (Some accept MCAT)	National Council Licensure Examination for RNs (NCLEX-RN) for RN	Graduate Record Examination (GRE)	Most chiropractic schools do not require an entrance exam.
Post Graduate Schooling	4 years – Professional Doctorate Program - Doctor of Medicine	3 Years – Master’s Program	2-4 years –Master’s or Professional Doctorate Programs in Nursing	3 years – Professional Doctorate Program in Physical therapy	4 years – Professional Doctorate Program in Chiropractic
Additional Education and Training - Required	4-year Residency	None	None	None	None
Additional Education and Training – Optional	1-3-year Fellowship	1-2-year optional education/training	1-2-year optional education/training	0.75-3-year optional education/training	1-year additional patient training/ 300 to 400 hours additional training to specialize.
Estimated Total Patient Care Hours Required Through Training	12,000-16,000 hours	2,000 hours	500-700 hours	2,000 hours	One-year clinical program (specific hours not available)

Degree or Certification Awarded	Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.)	Master's Degree of Physician Associate Studies	Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) or Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) available.	Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) ⁱ	Doctor of Chiropractic (D.C.)
Licensure and Continuing Education Requirements	Varies by State. General Requirements: State Licensing Cycle: Renewed every 1-3 years. Required Continuing Medical Education (CME) Credit Hours Per Year: 50 hours. Hours must be dedicated to different specialized areas, depending on state and specialization.	Varies by State. General Requirements: State Licensing Cycle: Exam every 10 years. Required Continuing Education (CE) Credit Hours Per Year: 50 hours.	Varies by State and Specialization. General Requirements: State Licensing Cycle: Renewed every 1-2 years. Required Continuing Education (CE) credit hours per year: Varies widely depending on specialization.	Varies by State. General Requirements: State Licensing Cycle: Renewed every 1-3 years. Required Continuing Education (CE) credit hours per year: Varies widely.	Varies by State. General Requirements: Renewed on licensing cycle regulated by state. As a requirement for renewal, most states mandate that chiropractors take continuing education (CE) courses and earn a specific number of credits each year.
Independent Practice/Practice Authority	Yes	Supervision and Collaboration requirements vary by State ⁱⁱ .	Practice Authority Varies by State ^{iii,iv}	Direct Access to a PT Varies by State ^v	Yes

Sources:

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ⁱ The Master of Physical Therapy and Master of Science in Physical Therapy degrees are no longer offered, and the entry-level degree is the Doctor of Physical Therapy degree. PTs who hold a Masters or bachelors in PT are encouraged to get their DPT.

ⁱⁱ PA Scope of Practice Laws: Interactive PA Scope of Practice Law Guide. Barton Associates. <https://www.bartonassociates.com/locum-tenens-resources/pa-scope-of-practice-laws>. Published 2021. Accessed July 15, 2021.

ⁱⁱⁱ State law chart: Nurse Practitioner Practice Authority. American Medical Association. <https://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2020-02/ama-chart-np-practice-authority.pdf>. Published 2021. Accessed July 15, 2021.

^{iv} Nurse Practitioner Scope of Practice Laws: Interactive Nurse Practitioner (NP) Scope of Practice Law Guide. <https://www.bartonassociates.com/locum-tenens-resources/nurse-practitioner-scope-of-practice-laws>. Published 2021. Accessed July 15, 2021.

^v Physical Therapy Direct Access Laws by State. GetPT. <http://getpt.org/physical-therapy-direct-access-laws-state/>. Accessed July 14, 2021.