

Planning for Life-Long Learning

Senovia looked at the brochures for continuing education courses. They all looked so good and they were all so expensive. She thought, "I've just finished my Associate's degree. There is so much that I still need to learn, but how can I pay for all of this?"

Life-Long Learning for the Physical Therapist Assistant

Entry-level education is just the beginning. Learning does not end at the conclusion of the physical therapist assistant educational program. Life-long learning involves continuing to question, read, and apply information that facilitates growth. It requires reflection and processing of experiences and integration of new developments into existing knowledge and practices.

Changes in policy requires changes in attitudes, practices, and sometimes, organizational structures. New developments, new technology, and collaboration also offers opportunities to grow and enhance the foundation gained during formal education. Life-long learning assures that clinicians use up-to-date and relevant information about teaching and learning, technology, administration, and clinical practice parameters.

Standard 5 of the *Guide for Conduct of the Physical Therapist Assistant* (see Appendix 2) indicates that physical therapist assistants (PTAs) shall achieve and maintain competence in the provision of selected physical therapy interventions. This involves three considerations, competence, self-assessment, and development (Table 25-1).

The Information Age

Information and knowledge are changing at a pace never before experienced. We are bombarded daily by e-mail, the Web, voicemail, fax, newspapers and magazines, professional journals, television,

unsolicited mail, and telemarketers calling us in our homes and businesses. Information overload has been well-documented. For the first time in history, our capabilities for generating information are far greater than the human capacities to process all the information produced.¹

Within the physical therapy field alone, we have seen the emergence of dozens of research journals, on-line publications, list-servs, and bulletin boards. How does one know what is most important? How does a practicing PTA access, sift through, prioritize, and decide to use the abundant information that is out there? There are several strategies that can guide career development.

A Career Development Plan

Set goals for career development. What interests do you have? Where do you see your career going in the next new months? The next year? In 5 years?

Self-Assessment

Let's look first at what you find interesting, exciting, and challenging. Consider yourself doing each of the activities in Table 25-2 in the next few years. What intrigues you? In which areas did you score the highest?

The career directions that you choose should be consistent with your interests. Interests can change with changes in responsibility and job requirements, as well. Therefore, what interests you now may not be what interests you for the future. You may want to return and repeat this inventory periodically to assess changes in your interests.