



So, you think you'd like to
work in the USA
HOW **FCCPT**
CAN HELP YOU



Perhaps you're in school studying to become a Physiotherapist, or maybe you're already working as a Physio; whether a student or working professional, the possibility of working temporarily or immigrating to another country appeals to many. In addition to courage and an adventurous spirit, you need information about the immigration and credentialing processes required to work in the country of your dreams. You also need to invest time in reading and studying information about becoming licensed in the US. This article presents introductory information about physical therapy credentialing processes in the United States.

The **Foreign Credentialing Commission on Physical Therapy (FCCPT)** is dedicated to supporting the efforts of foreign-educated Physios to come to the US to practice as a physical therapist, and is pleased to be asked to present information on the credentialing and licensure process. The FCCPT is the only credential

ing agency whose evaluations are accepted in all 53 licensure jurisdictions in the United States. FCCPT is also the **ONLY** qualifying organization dedicated exclusively to the review and evaluation of physical therapy credentials for immigration and licensure. To find more information about the credentialing process, visit our website at www.FCCPT.org.

Getting Started

In order to work and live in the US, the first 2 things you need to determine are the type of visa you need to work as a Physiotherapist (Physical Therapist in the US) and in which of the 53 licensure jurisdictions (50 states, Washington DC, Puerto Rico or US Virgin Islands) you would like to work. These two issues influence the type of credentialing process you will need to complete. A detailed description of immigration processes and visa types is beyond the scope of this article. The US State department has a useful website with a decision 'wizard' to help you decide which type of visa you need to come to the US (<http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/employment.html>). Selecting the state in which to work is a matter of personal preferences. FCCPT frequently

receive e-mails from foreign-educate PTs asking which state is 'easiest' to apply for PT licensure, or which state is 'best' to work as a PT. While states have differing licensure application processes and practice standards, the differences are not substantial, and these questions alone shouldn't determine where you select to live. To find links to the application procedures and standards of practice for all of the licensing authorities in the US, visit the website of the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (FSBPT) (<http://www.fsbpt.org/FreeResources/LicensingAuthoritiesContactInformation.aspx>). Family members or friends who are currently living in the US are the best source of information about the strengths and weaknesses of the different states.

The Credentialing Process

While it may seem complex, the credentialing process consists of 4 steps:

1) request for original documents from the appropriate institution;

2) verification and authentication of received documents;

3) evaluation of documents, and

4) production of a summary sent electronically to you and a licensure agency if you request. For complete information on the steps involved in the credentialing, read the section on the FCCPT website that describes the service you have chosen, specially "Overview of Steps to Follow".

(Note: the procedures for licensure application to the state of New York differ from all other jurisdictions. If you are interested in applying for licensure

in New York, you can find information about the process through the FCCPT website at www.fccpt.org/generalinformation/primaryServices/NYSCE/index.asp

After applying and paying for the credentialing service you need, you will submit forms as for schools, licensing and testing agencies, authorizing them to release original documents to FCCPT. It's important to realize that FCCPT must use only original documents received directly from institutions in your evaluation. (Note: other credentialing agencies may have different requirements and guidelines) You may not submit documents, even if you have received certified copies from the school or agency. You will be requested to submit information that only you can provide, for example, an agreement form with your picture and a copy of your diploma.

Once the original source documents have been received by the FCCPT, they are verified and authenticated by credentialers as true and original documents. If a document does not conform to proscribed standards or have the necessary seals and/or signatures, the credentialing agency will contact the school or other agency to verify that the documents are true. Request for verification may delay the evaluation process.

Finally, credentialers evaluate the authenticated original documents. Once all documents have been received by FCCPT, the actual evaluation itself may take up to 8 weeks to complete. An expedited review, completed in 6 weeks, is available for an additional fee. Only coursework completed in post-secondary education is assessed in the

educational credentials evaluation. Only courses found on official transcripts, within the official syllabi or course descriptions provided by the school are included in the evaluation. Evaluators use a standardized assessment tool, the Coursework Tool (CWT), to collect and evaluate PT and PTA education. The CWT is a course-by-course review of physical therapy education, based on accreditation criteria for US PT education programs, comparing the content and credits contained in the foreign-educated PT's education to undergraduate and professional education of the US-trained PT. To see how your education compares to a US PT program, you can download the CWT through the FCCPT website at <http://fccpt.org/GeneralInformation/FAQs/index.asp>.

To qualify for the healthcare worker's (Type 1) certificate for immigration, USCIS regulations require that a foreign-educated PTs' education must be determined to be equivalent to that first professional degree using the most current version of the CWT. Currently, the first-degree for US graduates is the master's degree with a minimum of 150 US semester credits, with a minimum of 90 credit hours contained in the professional portion of the degree.

In addition to professional education requirements, there are general education requirements consisting of physical and biological sciences, the humanities, and

social and behavioral sciences, and math coursework. There is no minimum number of general education credits required; the applicant's education must demonstrate that all of the content is sufficiently covered in the different areas. Individual state licensing agencies may have special or additional educational requirements. You can find each jurisdiction's educational requirements within their rules. In 2017, the first degree for US graduates will be the doctorate of physical therapy (DPT). It is unknown what USCIS and jurisdiction boards will require of foreign-educated PTs, but the number of credits will undoubtedly increase. You can follow changes in the CWT through the FCCPT website.

The evaluation process concludes with production of a summary report of the findings, comparing the applicant's education to the appropriate first US degree and jurisdictional licensure requirements, and identifying any areas of deficiency. You can use the report results to decide what, if any, supplemental coursework you may need to complete to be qualified to apply for licensure.

Requirements for Visa

If you need a healthcare worker's certificate to obtain the type of visa that permits employment as a PT in the U.S, required by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), then you would need to complete an evaluation (Type 1 Comprehensive Review) covering the following 3 areas:

- a) your educational credentials,
- b) eligibility for practice in the country where your completed your education and/or verification of any licenses you have held or currently hold, and

c) English proficiency as demonstrated by the Test of English as a Foreign Language or TOEFL. You can see the current TOEFL scores needed to work as a PT in the US at a section of the Foreign Credentialing Commission of Physical Therapy (FCCPT) website (<http://fccpt.org/GeneralInformation/PrimaryServices/T1/TOEFL/index.asp>) These three components of evaluation are required to obtain the healthcare worker's certificate, regardless of the credentialing agency you choose for credentials evaluation.

Summary

Whether you are seeking a credentials evaluation for immigration, application for licensure or admission to an education program, the following recommendations apply:

- 1) first, determine your immigration needs and where you hope to work and/or live;
- 2) know the requirements for the type of evaluation you need to complete;
- 3) research the licensure requirements for the state(s) that interest you;
- 4) identify the documents you will need to request or gather; and
- 5) start early as there may be a prolonged time to receive documents.