

FCCPT Update

The Use of “Retro Tools” – Coursework Evaluation Tools

Unlike their U.S. counterparts, foreign educated physical therapists were evaluated using educational standards that did not exist when they graduated.

At the 2005 FSBPT annual meeting, staff presented three Coursework Evaluation Tools (CWT), each matching previous entry-level educational requirements for US graduates. These tools are referred to as the “Retro Tools” and span the years 1955–1977, 1978–1991 and 1992–1997. Not yet a “retro tool” is the Fourth Edition Coursework Evaluation Tool, which reflects current CAPTE standards.

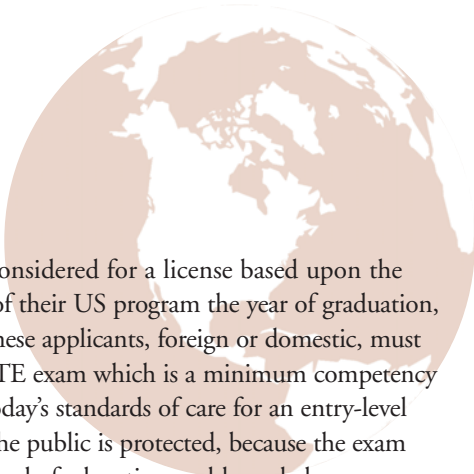
The 2005 Delegate Assembly adopted the position that credentials of foreign educated physical therapist licensure applicants should be evaluated using the Retro Tool that covers the date the applicant graduated from their respective physical therapy education program.

Federation jurisdictions are now deliberating the use of these tools for foreign-educated applicants not currently licensed in other US jurisdiction and for foreign-educated physical therapists that *are* currently licensed in other US jurisdictions (“endorsement”). As of this printing, two states have initiated the use of the Retro Tools, and another five to ten have begun writing regulatory language to incorporate their use.

Equitable Licensure Requirements for Foreign and US educated physical therapists

The development of these Retro Tools reflected a concern that licensure requirements for US-educated physical therapists and foreign-educated physical therapists be equitable. Prior to the development of retro tools, most jurisdiction endorsement procedures for foreign-educated physical therapists included another review of their educational credentials based on current standards. Endorsement procedures for US-educated physical therapists did not require another credentials review.

The use of the Retro Tools for the first license is also responsive to the call for equity, since a US graduate, who for whatever reason did not gain licensure at the time of



graduation, is still considered for a license based upon the accreditation status of their US program the year of graduation, not today. Each of these applicants, foreign or domestic, must pass the current NPTE exam which is a minimum competency exam, based upon today’s standards of care for an entry-level physical therapist. The public is protected, because the exam reflects the current level of education and knowledge necessary to practice safely in today’s healthcare environment. For instance, a graduate from 1975 who has not maintained an understanding of the advancements in physical therapy education and practice for the past 30 years, may have had a substantially equivalent education to a US contemporary, but this individual will not be prepared for the examination of current practice requirements (the NPTE) in the US and will not pass this final hurdle for licensure.

USCIS does not use “Retro Tools” for Immigration Purposes

The use of the “Retro Tools” for immigration, however, is a different matter. The United States Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) regulations state that healthcare worker certificates can be issued to candidates who meet the current standards of education in physical therapy. Thus when issuing a “Type I Comprehensive Credentials Evaluation Certificate,” the FCCPT will be using the current 4th Edition Coursework Evaluation Tool.

In the case where a jurisdiction wishes to use the Retro Tool, FCCPT can convert the findings to the pertinent Retro Tool which matches the year of graduation. (There is a small fee of \$50.00 for the added time required in producing the conversion tool and the additional reports.) The applicant will receive both reports, one reflecting findings for the USCIS review and the other reflecting the findings for the jurisdiction regulations.

As a result of these different standards, sometimes a candidate’s education may be substantially equivalent for the year of graduation to meet the jurisdiction’s requirements to be allowed to sit for the NPTE. They are not, however, found to be “substantially equivalent” to obtain the “Healthcare Worker Certificate” for visa or immigration purposes.

Those jurisdictions which require a Type I certificate for licensure may need to address the language of their