

Remediation for Foreign Educated Candidates

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Approximately 40% of all first-time foreign educated PT educational credentials reviews do not meet the minimum standards of the Federation's Coursework Evaluation Tool. Most deficiencies fall into two categories.

- General education criteria; this is the major reason candidates don't meet minimum standards.
- Professional education core content differences because scope of practice is different from U.S. scope of practice.

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In the U.S., although the degree offered is now post-baccalaureate, the evaluative criteria from CAPTE for core content has not changed appreciatively. What *has* changed?

1. The length of the educational programs has increased.
2. The level or depth of content in "diagnostic" skills for differential diagnosis and critical thinking has expanded. This reflects the growing degree of autonomy for the physical therapist within the scope of practice and the legal system with more and more jurisdictions allowing direct access.
3. The average PT program in the U.S., according to the APTA 2006 Fact Sheet, requires a full four-year degree before entry to the professional curriculum. Prior to this, a 2+3 model of PT curriculum (two years of pre-professional coursework and then three years of professional work) had existed, but it has disappeared. There are still some freshman entry programs, but even these have at least six semesters of pre-professional undergraduate work, followed by at least three years of professional content.
4. More general education courses are required.

General Education

General education in the U.S. is valued for the skills it brings the learner, such as critical and logical thinking, cultural understanding and competency, and general knowledge of the world in the broadest sense to improve communication abilities and skills.

Unlike the U.S. where most of today's students do not start professional education until after receiving a baccalaureate degree, most foreign educated physical therapists are able to proceed to professional training directly from high school equivalency. Occasionally there is a semester of general coursework at the college level, but after that, the programs focus on professional skills and knowledge.

It is critical to look at the applicant's ability to demonstrate knowledge and understanding commensurate with a post-



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secondary level of education. Supplemental courses for graduates of such foreign programs need to demonstrate skills necessary for critical thinking and the broad core content of the PT profession. The next question is where and how applicants can find the necessary courses to demonstrate these skills. The obvious answer is in any college or university recognized by the Department of Education in the U.S. or its equivalent in another country.

Care must be taken to accept only accredited or recognized educational programs. We have long been aware of the “diploma mills” or “degree mills,” which provide educational documents but students never complete a course. The newest twist on this scam are “accreditation mills,” which produce what looks like a legitimate accrediting body’s certificate, with very impressive names that sometimes have the same acronym as a legitimate accrediting agency.

There are also CLEP (College Level Exam Program) credits. This is an exam recognized in the U.S. for advanced U.S. high school graduates to take an exam in specific topics to demonstrate knowledge and abilities at the college freshman level. If the concept of the broad education is to demonstrate this knowledge level, then acceptance of the CLEP exams would be recommended. Opponents of CLEP exams indicate that it is the time spent in the classroom with other students that helps to build cultural competency. However, with distance learning, online coursework, and the virtual classroom available for U.S. educational coursework, this is no longer a strong argument and should be revisited if we are to equate U.S. and foreign candidates on the same criteria.

Professional Education

The second largest category of deficiencies is related to scope of practice. Most commonly, foreign programs do not teach geriatrics, care of the integumentary system, and to a lesser extent, care of the cardiopulmonary system. In the broader sense is also the concept of critical thinking or differential diagnosis, because the physical therapist in the country of

education is still in a prescriptive model.

It is harder to find acceptable supplemental coursework in professional education. The work must be completed within a recognized physical therapist program, and there are often no single courses specific to these content areas. However, there are perhaps tracts which cover the content which a non-matriculating student can follow.

For example, perhaps a combination of exercise physiology, therapeutic exercise and/or a cardiopulmonary course would meet a combined requirement to demonstrate ability in cardiopulmonary exam, evaluation, and interventions as well as critical thinking and maybe even some geriatric care. The non-matriculating student must fit into the curriculum design; the design should not have to change to meet the candidate’s requirements. Schools in your jurisdictions that have transitional DPT or MPT programs may be well designed to meet the individualized needs of foreign candidates. This does not mean that they must offer all courses every term, but if the courses in the common areas can be open to foreign candidates, this would help the community in developing strong and appropriately educated PTs.

I recently listened in at a board meeting where the idea and challenges of approval of continuing competency coursework were discussed, and thought how well some of these courses would meet the needs of foreign candidates as well, since they are designed to demonstrate skills in the continually changing U.S. scope of practice. I would encourage jurisdictions to look at some of the courses that require testing and demonstration of competency to meet the supplemental needs of the foreign graduates, and to encourage educational programs that are offering these continuing competency courses to consider marketing them to foreign candidates in your community.

The FCCPT is in the process of developing a resource service for foreign candidates who are not initially able to meet the educational criteria to assist them in identifying supplemental coursework to meet the criteria. The FCCPT will announce more about this service later this year. ■



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