

The FSBPT Coursework Evaluation Tool: A Pre-Screening Test?

One of the critical roles of every licensing board is to assure the competence of physical therapists and physical therapist assistants prior to licensure. A component of this process is assuring that the foreign educated candidate obtain education and training that is substantially equivalent to that obtained by candidates who are educated in the United States. Sounds simple, but as the current generation might say and most licensing board members would agree, “NOT!”

In an effort to deal with this complex problem, the FSBPT Coursework Evaluation Tool (CWT) was developed. The Tool went through an external validation study in 2003. The current Fourth Edition has been validated to the Commission for Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) standards.

Potential Benefits to Requiring the Tool

There are many potential benefits to requiring the FSBPT Coursework Evaluation Tool all of which relate to public protection.

1. It is currently the *only* credentials evaluation tool that has been validated.
2. Five credentialing agencies have licensing agreements to use the Tool; the Foreign Credentialing Commission on Physical Therapy (FCCPT), the International Educational Research Foundation (IERF), the International Consultants of Delaware (ICD), International Credentialing Associates (ICA) and University of Texas at Austin.
3. It creates uniformity in establishing a minimal standard for evaluating the foreign educated physical therapist while allowing states to maintain a higher standard if they so choose.
4. Those that meet the standards established by the Coursework Evaluation Tool have a higher first-time pass rate on the National Physical Therapy Exam (NPTE) than those that do not meet CWT standards.
5. Here is one that you may not have thought of. If enough jurisdictions require the Tool, it may lead to a national requirement that foreign trained physical therapists entering with an H-1B Visa have their education deemed equivalent using the Tool prior to being allowed into this country. The Tool could become a pre-screening test!

The Federation has had some preliminary discussions with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). USCIS

has suggested that once the Federation's CWT is required by a substantial number of jurisdictions, the CWT could become the test for entry into this country with an H-1B Visa. With such a pre-screening test, foreign educated candidates would not be able to enter this country until they had established equivalency.

Advantages for USCIS

One of the reasons USCIS is interested in the Coursework Evaluation Tool becoming a pre-screening test is the fact that there is a high correlation between meeting the requirements of the Tool and passing an English equivalency exam with ultimately passing the NPTE. USCIS would like to have a pre-screening requirement to assure that an applicant will not enter the US on a professional visa without being able to be licensed. Applicants coming into this country on a professional visa that do not pass the exam potentially create problems for USCIS as they must track these individuals and manage their change in immigration status. There is high risk that some of these individuals will attempt to stay in this country illegally.

Advantages for Foreign Educated Candidates

There are also advantages for foreign educated candidates. There is a huge financial and emotional cost to an applicant coming into this country with the expectation of staying and working. Unfortunately some candidates pay this cost only to find they do not meet states' requirements or that they are unable to pass the NPTE. Pre-screening protects those who may be unqualified from making this move until they have been deemed substantially equivalent. Once they have been deemed substantially equivalent via the Tool, the candidate is much more likely to pass the NPTE and ultimately be able to work in this country and not face ultimate deportation.

Advantages for Licensing Boards

There are also advantages for jurisdiction licensing boards. If the Coursework Evaluation Tool became the requirement for a work visa in physical therapy, then all applicants would be assessed equally from the moment they entered this country. While jurisdictions would still have the right to require a higher standard, there would be much more consistency between jurisdictions. This would make the process for



evaluating foreign educated candidates much easier at the state level and would also help expedite movement of foreign educated PTs between states. Currently a foreign educated physical therapist may not be able to meet the requirements of a state even though he or she has been successfully practicing in another state.

Advantages for NPTE Security

Another less obvious but significant benefit is related to the security of the NPTE. A consistent standard like the CWT used prior to sitting for the exam would lessen the number of foreign educated physical therapists that do not meet the standards from taking and viewing the exam.

What Needs to Happen

While most jurisdictions use one or several of the agencies that use the CWT, not all of require the agency to use the Coursework Evaluation Tool in the credentialing process. Even fewer include this requirement in statute or rules language. In order for USCIS to consider using the Tool as a pre-screening instrument, a majority of jurisdictions must require the use of the Tool in statute or rules.

If enough jurisdictions require the Tool, it may lead to a national requirement that foreign trained physical therapists entering with an H-1B Visa have their education deemed equivalent using the Tool prior to being allowed into this country. The Tool could become a pre-screening test!

Sample language for inclusion of this requirement in rules follows:

All foreign educated physical therapists must submit directly to the Board, prior to obtaining an application, a Credentials Evaluation Statement (“the Report”) of professional education and training prepared by a Board-approved credentials evaluation agency.

(A) The Report must provide evidence and documentation that the applicant’s education outside a state or territory of the United States is substantially equivalent to the education of a physical therapist who graduated from an accredited physical therapy education program approved by the Board pursuant to _____.

(B) To determine substantial equivalency, the approved credentialing evaluation agency shall use the appropriate Coursework Evaluation Tool (“CWT”) adopted by the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy. The appropriate CWT means the CWT that applies at the time the foreign educated physical therapist graduated from their physical therapy program.¹

In fulfilling its critical role of protecting the public, it is important that licensing boards provide validated standards for the assurance of competence. The only validated standard for assessing the substantial equivalence of the foreign educated physical therapist is the Federation’s Coursework Evaluation Tool. The ability of this Tool to become a pre-screening instrument is dependent on jurisdictions requiring it. By doing so, boards will be helping each other, protecting the public, protecting the integrity of the exam and ultimately doing a service to all licensees. Can we make it easier to assure that the potential foreign educated licensee has obtained education and training that is substantially equivalent to that obtained by candidates who are educated in the United States? “YES!” ■

For more information on the Coursework Evaluation Tool as a pre-screening test, please contact Mark Lane PT, VP of Professional Standards and Assessment at (800) 881-1430, ext. 232 or mlane@fsbpt.org. Also contact Mark if you are planning on a rule change requiring the Tool.

¹ <http://www.ptboard.state.or.us/PTBrd/docs/Current.Topics/Final.Adopted.Mark.up.Version.for.Web.03.07.07.pdf> Modified from Oregon Physical Therapy Board’s 04/01/07 Adopted Rule Changes.