

How to choose a physical therapist

This is a very big, and very important topic. Now more than ever, you need to do your homework and choose wisely. A more skilled and knowledgeable therapist will mean faster, more meaningful results; and treatment that gets you back on your feet or feeling better, faster.

First, make sure that you receive physical therapy from a licensed physical therapist. That seems silly, but you would be surprised at the number of people who provide “physical therapy” services, yet are not licensed in it! Physical Therapists are professional health care providers who are licensed by the state in which they practice.

Licensure is indicated by the designators directly after a therapist’s name. PT means licensed Physical Therapist, MPT or MSPT involved obtaining a masters degree. DPT is relatively new and is a clinical doctorate in Physical Therapy. This is NOT a PhD, which requires more academic work, and possibly a research-based thesis.

The second initials, if there are any, usually indicate additional specialty licensure or advanced certification. A letter followed by “CS” indicates Advanced Clinical Specialization and is an additional board certification by the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties (ABPTS). For example, PCS means Pediatric Clinical Specialist. There are eight areas of specialty. Clinical Specialists have a minimum of 2,000 treatment hours in their area of specialization, with recertification requirements that include teaching, research, and graduate education.

The third set of initials typically indicates additional certifications or qualifications that are obtained outside of the ABPTS. Examples of these are C-NDT (Neurodevelopmental Treatment), CAMT (Manual Therapy), CKTI (Kinesio Taping).

Regardless, consider both the academic AND clinical expertise of the therapist you are interviewing. Be selective. You are the consumer and have a right to know what it is you are purchasing, and the outcome will affect your health. It is fine to ask questions (nicely). Good therapists will not be offended, and should be honest with their answers. You want to find a therapist who frequently treats other clients with the same diagnosis or ailment. Ideally, they will also be Specialty Certified, or have additional certification indicating advanced learning in the area relative to your particular issue. You may want to ask if they participate in any professional organizations, or graduate level courses. Looking these up on the Internet will give you a good idea of that therapist’s interests and level of professional involvement. Lastly, you may always ask for references from other clients.

Outside of qualification, don't forget to inquire if the physical therapist participates with your insurance company. Receiving care from a participating physical therapist might make the financial responsibility somewhat easier. There may be good reasons, however, to see a physical therapist that does not participate with your insurance plan. If you need a physical therapist that has special skills related to your particular condition, or if the location or other aspects of the care or the facility meet your needs, this may be a good choice for you. Out of network therapists normally do not require a co-pay and should provide you with an invoice suitable for submission to your insurance company. Most insurance companies will reimburse 60-80% of the "usual and customary" rate.

If you need help, just go to www.apta.org or give me a call!

Deirdre McDowell, PT, PCS, C/NDT
<http://www.deirdremcdowell.com>

713-299-3079