

# Physiotherapy student clinical placements: A guide for private practice providers

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# Physiotherapy student private practice clinical placement guidelines

## Introduction

To meet registration requirements physiotherapy students graduating from an accredited university will have the skills to work in a range of settings. As many graduates seek employment in private practice, having the opportunity to undertake experience prior to graduating is highly desirable. We value private practice's commitment to providing quality learning experiences for our students. Without the generosity of your time and willingness to impart your knowledge and skills, students would miss out on the invaluable experience of clinical practice in the private practice sector.

This document has been written for private practitioners and practice managers to provide information regarding hosting physiotherapy students.

## Why host physiotherapy students?

A private practice placement is a fundamental experience that can greatly enhance the readiness of new graduates entering this area of work. By agreeing to host physiotherapy students on placement you are directly contributing to improving the knowledge and readiness of physiotherapy graduates.

Having students may value-add to your service delivery in a variety of ways including access to up-to-date knowledge, research, and enthusiasm for learning. Clients may receive longer sessions or additional sessions depending on the model of student placement undertaken. Clients in group classes may receive extra assistance and support with student involvement.

Hosting students also allows you to partner with the University/Universities to attend professional development events and clinical educator training (where available), participate in University committees or internal review processes.

Hosting students enables practices to contribute to the development of their own future workforce and that of the private practice sector in general. It also allows you to have an "extended interview" with potential future employees.

Being a clinical supervisor/educator provides job diversity and can develop staff skills in different ways to traditional clinical practice. Being an educator can improve evidence-based practice and clinical reasoning skills as it requires one to reflect on current practices and rationalise treatment/management choices. It also provides practitioners with a direct link to contemporary

physiotherapy curricula and the opportunity to remain in touch with the evolution of physiotherapy education and the profession more broadly.

## Placement types

Universities offer different practice experiences depending on their program. Students may, for example, complete a full five-week placement, whilst others may come for shorter observational, or introductory, placements where students undertake responsibilities similar to a physiotherapy assistant. Universities will be able to inform you of the specific structure and learning objectives of their different placement types. Please contact your local university representative to discuss the available options for hosting students.

The five-week placements, where students are expected to meet new graduate/entry-level standards and are assessed using the [Assessment of Physiotherapy Practice \(APP\)](#), have certain requirements that are outlined below.

## Placement requirements

For placements where students are expected to meet entry level standards upon completion of their placement (e.g. 5 week/core/elective/finals) below is a summary of common University expectations. These will assist private practitioners to determine their capacity to support students and provide them with an appropriate learning opportunity.

Private practice placement providers are expected to:

- i. Provide appropriate orientation to students including site orientation and Occupational Health and Safety and Emergency policies and procedures
- ii. Be aware of, and prepared for, supervision requirements:
  - a. Identify suitable staff who can facilitate student learning in the private practice context. i.e. nominate staff to be clinical educators (CE)
  - b. Enable clinical educators to access training and resources on the facilitation of learning, provision of feedback and assessment of students in clinical practice.
  - c. Enable clinical educators to have adequate time in their own schedule to supervise and support the student and to make informed decisions about a student's competency.

- d. The clinical educator will select appropriate clients for the student to see and will assume responsibility for the management provided by the student.
  - e. Supervision of physiotherapy specific skills must be provided by a qualified and registered physiotherapist.
  - f. While it is not essential to have only one clinical educator, students must be aware of who the primary supervisor is and therefore who to go to with questions/ queries. The primary supervisor should also be responsible for assessing the student.
- iii. Be able to provide students with the opportunity to be clinically involved / get hands-on practice in managing patients as appropriate and under supervision. The clinical placement is not usually primarily observational unless previously agreed to but may include some observational engagement.
- a. Offer regular significant opportunity for students to demonstrate their clinical reasoning skills and “hands on” patient management i.e. the ability to **assess, treat and/or develop a treatment plan** (not just observing or following a treatment plan). Students may have their own small clinical load, but this can be supplemented with activities that provide them with significant opportunities for learning if necessary.
  - b. Students are expected to reach entry-level competency in the following domains of practice: *professional behaviour, communication, assessment, analysis & planning, intervention, evidence-based practice and risk management*. To be assessed on these criteria, students need opportunities to demonstrate these skills. There are various ways that students can achieve this and University contacts can support you to develop strategies that suit your practice, if required. Typically, at the end of a 5-week placement, students would be able to: manage a variety of patients with relatively uncomplicated needs, such that the patient/client’s major problems are identified, major goals established, and treatment is completed safely and effectively within a reasonable time frame. While achieving this, the student is aware of their limitations and knows when to seek assistance.
- iv. Assess students’ performance and provide feedback:
- a. Provide regular, timely, specific and constructive feedback.
  - b. Provide assessment and feedback at the mid-point and end of placement (as determined by the University).
  - c. Universities will provide support, education and training on assessment and feedback requirements. Most Universities in Australia and New Zealand use the [Assessment of Physiotherapy Practice \(APP\) tool](#). This is a standardised and valid

assessment tool (Dalton et al 2012). Please contact your university representative for details on assessment requirements and processes.

- v. Minimise expectations of travel between sites if required
- vi. Engage with the University's Physiotherapy department/School to understand processes and requirements.
- vii. Negotiate any adjustments to placement contact hours: Work patterns may vary in a private practice setting and it may be necessary to have students engaged outside of standard hours. Variations are best planned in advance to ensure the correct match of students to the practice service needs. It is important to discuss contact hours with the university contact when offering the placement opportunity.

## Student requirements

All students enrolled within an approved program of study are registered with AHPRA. They are therefore endorsed to undertake clinical training under the supervision of a registered physiotherapist.

In addition to this, all physiotherapy students are required to be fully compliant with Department of Health standards before and during their clinical placements. These include:

- Immunisations
- Current/ valid Police Check
- Current/ valid Working with Children Check

And may also include (at some Universities only):

- CPR proficiency
- First Aid

Students are also insured by their respective Universities to participate in supervised clinical practice in various clinical learning environments, including private practice.

## Models of private practice placements

As with other aspects of clinical placements, there is variability in models of private practice placements. In most situations, the models utilised can be broadly summarised under the following three examples. You may choose whichever model is most suited to your practice.

1. Student led: The practitioner initially assesses/triages their clients to build a client list for a student. The student provides additional client sessions free or at a reduced cost to the client. The student may start with a few patients and observation, and build over time as they progress through the placement.
2. Shared care: The student does components of assessments and treatments with/for practitioners. The client session is shared from the start, with the student engagement with the client increasing over time.
3. Shared care progressing to student led: Student gradually manages the session over the placement with the later weeks mostly student led (fully supervised). This may start as observation with a client and progress from there.
4. Student clinic: A private practice actively utilises the whole year and sources students from several universities to enable a continuous stream of patients to see students. This tends to be larger providers who have worked out a model that works for them. The type of model will vary, but they may progress as per option 3.

## Suggestions for effective clinical education in private practice

There are many ways to allow students to participate actively in client care. To increase the client load and learning opportunities for students private practices have reported success when utilising the following strategies:

- i. You may choose for students to perform **extra sessions** free of charge, or at a reduced rate which the client funds privately but may be in line with, or below, their usual out-of-pocket expenses under their health insurer (i.e. their gap payment). This may also provide a benefit to your clients by allowing them more sessions before reaching the ceiling limit on their rebated services under their insurer.
- ii. You may choose to **extend your physiotherapy sessions** (e.g. by 15-30 minutes), in which physiotherapy students can provide additional services that would not generally be provided

due to time restrictions, such as the creation and delivery of more detailed education, support for self-management, supervised gym and home exercises or additional manual therapy.

- iii. Students can still be **actively involved in the process of clinical reasoning**, rather than just passively observing. Involving them integrally in history taking, assessments, and treatments, and having them involved as a partner with you on patient management can enhance their understanding of real world practice.
- iv. Ask students to **provide assessment and treatment plans for clients**, even if they do not provide the actual service. This will allow you to assess their knowledge, clinical reasoning and planning skills
- v. Consider using templates such as the **Clinical Reasoning Model** so that students complete an in-depth analysis of the patients they see/observe so that they get the most out of the learning experience. You can ask your university to provide specific templates if needed.
- vi. Where applicable, assist therapists with work at local sporting clubs and group therapy classes (e.g. hydrotherapy)

## Working together to prepare graduates for private practice

As Health Education Providers, it is imperative that we ensure that students graduating from Physiotherapy programs are work ready and effective and safe first point practitioners upon graduation. To achieve this, students need to be exposed to a wide diversity of clinical practice settings and scenarios, and to have opportunities to develop their skills in all aspects of client management. This relies on clinicians, such as you who are invested in student education, being able to provide students with hands on, practical placements. Furthermore, hosting physiotherapy students can provide a range of benefits for the organisation, staff and clients.

We are keen to work together with your practice to continue to improve experiences for clients, students and clinicians. If you have any other suggestions or queries, please contact your local University representative.

## References and resources

Assessment of Physiotherapy Practice: <http://www.appeducation.com.au/>

APPLinkup: <https://www.applinkup.com/>

Dalton M, Davidson M and Keating JL. The Assessment of Physiotherapy Practice (APP) is a reliable measure of professional competence of physiotherapy students: a reliability study. *Journal of Physiotherapy* 2012;58(1):49-56