

Ensuring we write good clinical notes

In physiotherapy practice we are accountable for what we do; we practise in safe and effective ways, evolving by improving the quality of our practice.

A critical tool to our activities as a physiotherapist is our clinical notes. Clinical notes are a record of our own work, a reference for our peers, a way of building trust with people who pay for our services, and a demonstration of our adherence to regulation. Without a quality record of our activities, we cannot demonstrate that we uphold our ethical and professional obligations.

Below is a brief outline of the ways in which we are accountable, including some examples of how we can demonstrate these accountabilities in our clinical notes. A good place to start improving the quality of clinical notes is to review one of these examples with respect to your own practice. Further support material and case studies are available on the [APA website](#).

We are accountable to ourselves

We write clinical notes as a way of meeting our own ethical and professional standards.

We follow workplace policies and procedures that outline safe, quality actions and behaviours, such as our commitment to peer-reviewed audits of our clinical notes.*

We address competing priorities and set aside dedicated time (either within the consultation or as soon as practicable) to write and maintain quality notes.

We audit our own notes to assess the areas in which we can improve our notes as a communication tool.

We are accountable to our peers

Our peers may need to rely on our notes to provide safe and quality care, and we may rely upon theirs, thus we hold each other to account.

'Safety' is our core responsibility for how we act and behave. We also expect this of our peers.

We use shorthand with caution to ensure that our peers have access to clear and accurate notes.

When we notice that the quality of clinical notes deviates from good professional standards, we are responsible for discussing this with the appropriate people. We tackle this conversation, even when it might be difficult, by preparing well for it.

We are accountable to our clients and others who pay for their care

We develop a structured documentation process that incorporates the requirements of third parties who subsidise our care, such as a process for completing 'request for funding' forms (eg, workers' compensation).

We ensure that clinical notes are aligned with the [national physiotherapy service descriptors](#) so that they meet Private Health Insurance requirements.

Clinical notes or reports that we write for our clients (paper or digital applications, for example My Health Record) are written in a way that makes them readable by the audience.

We are accountable to the law, AHPRA and the Physiotherapy Board of Australia

- We maintain recency of practice ([Physiotherapy Board of Australia– PhysioBA– registration](#))
- We abide by our code of conduct(s) ([PhysioBA](#) and [APA](#))
- We audit our notes to ensure that we include legal requirements of contemporaneity and adequacy.

* Peer-review of clinical notes in a solo practice may not seem feasible. However, we understand the importance of including peer review as one way we are accountable in our own practice. We can do this through collaboration within our professional network(s) using a peer-agreed, reproducible and structured audit process.