

AzPTA State Government Affairs Committee – Position statement from Kadeen Mansor, PT

A rose by any other name... A position piece on the regulatory designation change to DPT.

There is consideration in Arizona to change the professional regulatory designation of physical therapists from physical therapist (PT) to doctor of physical therapy (DPT). I would like to offer some insight on this proposal for those who have not been privy to the conversations held in the past concerning this issue.

First, we must discuss what this change in regulatory designation does not do.

1. This change in regulatory designation does not confer a doctoral degree on any physical therapist
2. This change in regulatory designation does not change the requirements to be a physical therapist
3. This change in regulatory designation does not affect the professionalism of any physical therapist
4. This change in regulatory designation does not prohibit physical therapists with a doctoral level education from recognizing and professing their degree
5. This change in regulatory designation does not change the regulatory designation of physical therapists in any other state or jurisdiction

It is very apparent that this change in regulatory designation is just that: a change in the title of licensed physical therapists in Arizona. It is not a magical scroll that will improve patient care, or make anyone smarter. It will not negate the efforts, or financial investments of those individuals that sought out an advanced degree. It does not make continuing education irrelevant.

The question becomes, then, why bother? Answer: A change in regulatory designation can have a significant impact on the public perception of physical therapists. How?

1. This change in regulatory designation creates a singular title for all licensed physical therapists, regardless of entry level degree, continuing education, or experience.
2. This change in regulatory designation clarifies the doctoral nature of our profession to everyone (general public, other healthcare practitioners, insurance entities, etc.)
3. This change in regulatory designation conforms to and supports the future of our profession as defined by APTA Vision 2020.

The most significant problem in the profession of physical therapy is our lack of recognition. Most “Doctors” do not recognize physical therapists as doctoral level practitioners. The general public (other healthcare providers included) has little awareness of what physical therapy is/does, and has no idea of our capabilities as physical therapists. We have a long road ahead of us in reaching a uniform identity for the profession, but that journey cannot even start until we are all pointed in the same direction. From a marketing standpoint, this change in regulatory designation is essential to sell ourselves to the world. From a professional standpoint, we must put aside personal reservations and recognize the greater good this change will have on the profession. I have listened to many arguments about the percentage of practicing physical therapists that have a doctoral level education and how that somehow matters. The fact of the matter is that by all estimates we have reached a simple majority of doctors, and that increases every single day. To not recognize those individuals would be to deny the rights of a majority to placate the minority. I personally support this change in regulatory designation as soon as possible, in part because I realize that it will happen eventually. The most compelling reason to support this change in regulatory designation now is that once it is done, we can focus our efforts on more important issues.