

CONSUMER Ask an Expert!

choose a Physical Therapist/ Treatment Facility

The role of a physical therapist is to restore, prevent, and maintain your body's musculoskeletal system, cardiovascular system, and neurologic system. Physical therapists typically work on larger muscles and joints, including the back, neck, arms, and legs; they also work with balance and vestibular (dizziness) problems. Physical therapists also attempt to prevent injuries at work or with sports. Overall physical therapists treat impairments (pain, swelling, loss of motion) that hamper the ability to perform a specific activity. Physical therapists return you to work, sports or play.

Chances are you have already heard of physical therapy. You might have heard from a friend how physical therapy helped relieve his or her back or neck pain. You might know someone who needed physical therapy after surgery or an injury. What if you need physical therapy? How do you choose the right facility and the right physical therapist for you?

Read on. Physical therapists are good people to know. They are educated in understanding the interaction of all your body parts. Their hands-on approach includes examination, diagnosis, and treatment of a variety of problems. They teach you how to take care of yourself through proper exercise and healthier body movements to prevent future injury. Physical therapists provide treatment for every body part of the musculoskeletal system working with infants to the elderly - more than one million people every day.

Choosing the Right Physical Therapist - Reputation: Chances are someone close to you has had physical therapy and would share their experience with you. Being comfortable and confident with your therapist is important. Your confidence in their expertise is crucial as you work together toward your treatment goals. Ask your friends and family:

- How did the staff treat them?
- Did they make gains and achieve the results expected?
- Did they have input into the treatment?
- Would they go to that facility again?

Team Approach: Look for a facility where the staff works together as a team. The clinicians who are properly trained and licensed provide a higher quality of care. The physical therapist should communicate well with your physician. A good facility will consistently pair patients with staff whose experience and expertise meet the patient's needs. The profession is also calling for direct access to physical therapy services - this requires special certification and allows you to be treated without a physician referral. The physical therapists should however, continue to work closely with your physician. We suggested to first determine what your insurance plan or workers compensation plan would cover as far as physical therapy services and/or medical services. Your benefits will be verified, all insurance authorizations and workers compensation authorizations will be performed as soon as possible. This way no questions arise as your treatment progresses. "Ultimately it is the person's responsibility to know what their insurance plan covers, but we are here to help." In consultation with your physical therapist you should be completely aware of the number of visits allowed by your insurance plan and any benefit limitations. You should also be informed if your physical therapist participates with your insurance company. Pennsyl-

vania and Federal Law states that you can choose from whom you receive your physical therapy. If your employer has a panel of providers, Pennsylvania Law states that you must see a provider on that list or panel for 90 days. After that you can choose the provider you would like to treat you. Many employers and physicians suggest that you can only go to a specific provider or that you should see the physical therapist down the hall. This is not true. Just as you have the right to choose any physician who accepts your insurance, you have the right to choose your physical therapist.

Focus on finding the right physical therapist by asking three basic questions: 1) What is the background of the physical therapist? The patient really needs to ask "Are you a licensed physical therapist?" "No licensed physical therapist should have a problem answering this question - there should be no hesitation." The licensing information for each

individual physical therapist needs to be on display in plain sight - ask. A master's degree or doctorate degree along with membership in the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) and any specialty information are excellent credentials. You will find all the above at Lycoming Physical Therapy. All clinicians are licensed physical therapists in good standing with the APTA and complete continuing education re-

quirements each year. All physical therapists have their Master's degrees and two have received their doctorates! Further, each clinician is certified to practice without a physician referral (some insurers still necessitate the physician referral to be covered). Surgeons, neurosurgeons, HEENT physicians, and family physicians. As such they maintain open communication with your physician and obtain specific protocols to accommodate their specific regimens. Your initial evaluation and treatment plan will be forwarded to your physician for approval and your treatment would be completed accordingly.

Remember that no two cases are exactly alike and no two treatment plans are exact. Personal care and treatments to meet your needs and goals are paramount.

The final question to ask involves exactly what your treatment will involve. At Locust Grove your physical therapist will review your needs starting with an explanation of the injury or condition, your goals to be achieved in physical therapy, your actual exercise plan and what to expect after treatment is completed. Each plan will be individualized as no two injuries or conditions are exactly the same. Your physical therapist may suggest some modalities such as hot packs, ultrasound, or electric stimulation. However, be wary of those who treat only with modalities instead of a supervised exercise plan or manual treatment. All physical therapy should include an exercise program tailored to meet your individual needs along with a home exercise program to be completed between physical therapy sessions and after discharge. This is used to maintain the goals achieved in physical therapy; such as preventing low back pain from recurring. Locust Grove Therapy will develop that exercise program, make sure you are comfortable performing it independently, and issue pictures of the exercises along with the instruction for completing the upon discharge.



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