

Position Statement – NC Board of Physical Therapy Examiners

10. Use of Clinical Designator, PT, DPT, and PTA

PT & PTA designator originally printed in the Board Newsletter, 1994, Issue 12

DPT designator printed in Board Newsletter, 2012, Issue 44

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In North Carolina, the required clinical designator for physical therapist is PT and for physical therapist assistant is PTA.

Can a licensed physical therapist with a doctoral degree use the designation “Dr.” with their name?

The North Carolina Physical Therapy Practice Act and Board rules do not specifically address this question; however, licensed physical therapists should not mislead or misrepresent their role to patients or the general public. Whether intentional or not, it is the responsibility of licensed physical therapists to ensure that patients clearly understand that a licensed physical therapist is **not** a medical doctor.

To the extent that a physical therapist can distinguish the doctoral degree in physical therapy when communicating with others, that is permitted. However, it is problematic if a DPT is using terms or acronyms with patients or the general public that are confusing or misleading. A DPT should carefully choose words and language so as to not to mislead the public about whether the DPT is a medical doctor.

The term “Graduated” as defined in 21 NCAC 48A .0105 is used in the context of the application process for obtaining a PT or PTA license. The clinical designator is appropriate to use only after the degree has been conferred and the individual is licensed to practice physical therapy in the state of North Carolina.

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