

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.

Q: Can a physical therapist with a doctoral degree call himself/herself “Dr.”?

A: The **North Carolina Physical Therapy Practice Act** and Board’s rules do not specifically address this question; however, a physical therapist should not mislead or misrepresent himself / herself to patients or the general public. It does not matter whether it is intentional or unintentional, it the responsibility of the physical therapist to make sure that that the patient clearly understands that he/she 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, if the manner in which the DPT is currently introducing himself / herself or writing correspondence to patients or the general public is confusing, that is a problem. The DPT needs to choose his/her words carefully to clarify that he/she is **not** 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.

Kathy Arney, PT, MA, Executive Director
NC Board of Physical Therapy Examiners
8300 Health Park Suite 233
Raleigh, NC 27615
Phone: 1-919-490-6393 / 800-800-8982
Fax: 1-919-490-5106
Email: karney@ncptboard.org
Web: www.ncptboard.org