Preparation for the Oncologic Certified Specialist Examination

The Oncologic Certified Specialist Examination, administered by the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialist (ABPTS), is a certification process for physical therapists (PTs) that are committed to providing the best evidence-based care to cancer survivors. Preparation for
the Oncologic Certified Specialist examination requires a commitment of time, energy and
focus to the entire process in order to be successful. This document is designed to help you in
your preparation for the specialist examination. This document does not attempt to provide
an exhaustive list of resources nor a foolproof way of studying. Reviewing and using the
resources on this list does not guarantee passing the exam.

This list was prepared by the Academy of Oncologic Physical Therapy as a service to PTs taking
the Oncologic Certified Specialist examination.

The ABPTS (http://www.abpts.org) states, “Specialization is the process by which a physical
therapist builds on a broad base of professional education and practice to develop a greater
depth of knowledge and skills related to a particular area of practice.” Oncologic Certified
Specialists treat in a wide variety of settings (e.g. acute hospital, rehabilitation units, home
care, private practice, skilled nursing facilities, assisted living units, and hospice) and to a
diverse population of cancer survivors. For the purpose of this document a cancer survivor is
any person diagnosed with cancer. Preparation for the examination must take into account the
management of cancer survivors over the life span and with complex acute and chronic
medical histories.

To begin your application process:

1. Request all application materials from ABPTS. The candidate guide is located at: Candidate
   Guide (.pdf). Check ABPTS Oncologic web page frequently for updates:
   http://www.abpts.org/Certification/Oncology/

   - Resources
     - Description of Specialty Practice: Oncology
     - Specialist Certification Examination Outline: Oncology
     - What Activities Constitute Direct Patient Care? (.ppt)
     - Presentation: Enhancing Professional Development Through Certification

2. Review requirements thoroughly and ensure that you have enough clinical hours in
the specialty to sit for the examination, and write and submit your case reflection, or
that you have satisfied the requirements to sit based on completion of an accredited
residency program in oncologic PT.
3. Create a timeline for yourself that includes time to complete the application process including writing the case reflection, gather resources, talk and collaborate with others, and thoroughly study for all the elements of the examination.

**Suggestions for Studying for the Oncologic Certified Specialist Exam**

- Once you apply for the exam, the ABPTS sends you as part of your application fee the Description of Specialty Practice (DSP) and a self-assessment tool so you can determine areas to focus your review. The DSP for Oncologic Physical Therapy was published by ABPTS in 2017. You can also use the examination outline as a guideline for review in Chapter 4 of the DSP and available at:  
  [http://www.abpts.org/Specialist_Certification/Oncology/Specialist_Certification_Examination_Outline_Oncology/](http://www.abpts.org/Specialist_Certification/Oncology/Specialist_Certification_Examination_Outline_Oncology/)

- Evaluate the time you will need to prepare for the certification examination. Six months is most likely the minimum one should consider though everyone learns at different paces; this is a recommendation only.

- The DSP and self-assessment tool are available for purchase at the APTA online store:  
  (Oncologic DSP and self-assessment tool are not up on the APTA online store yet, anticipate mid-April, 2018)

- There is no official preparatory course for the Oncologic Certified Specialist examination. Chapter 2 of the DSP provides an expanded content outline for the examination and sample questions are available in Chapter 5 of the DSP provided by ABPTS. Review the practice questions provided and consider how to study for questions that are worded in multiple-choice style where there aren’t necessarily wrong answers but best/better answers.  
  [http://www.abpts.org/Certification/Oncology/](http://www.abpts.org/Certification/Oncology/)

- Residency programs are designed specifically to educate graduates to become an Oncologic Certified Specialist. Residency programs typically take about 1 year to complete and offer 1:1 mentoring throughout the year with experts, including soon to be Oncologic Certified Specialists. There are several developing Residency Programs for Oncologic PTs with more growth expected. The DSP not only forms the basis for the exam; the DSP is the basis for the Description of Residency Practice which dictates the curriculum in residency programs. There are no accredited oncologic residencies at this time. For a list of APTA oncologic residency programs, visit:  
  [http://www.abptrfe.org/ResidencyPrograms/ProgramsDirectory/](http://www.abptrfe.org/ResidencyPrograms/ProgramsDirectory/)

- As these residency programs in Oncologic PT develop, enrollment in an APTA accredited Oncologic Clinical Residency Program is an excellent way to acquire the skills and knowledge that may help you be successful on the Oncologic Certified Specialist examination.
• Become a member of the Academy of Oncologic Physical Therapy to
  o Receive the peer reviewed journal, Rehabilitation Oncology, visit:
    http://journals.lww.com/rehabonc/pages/default.aspx, and subscribe to the RSS
electronic table of contents notification and review archived issues of the journal for
articles such as systematic reviews on clinical outcome measures from the EDGE Task
Force.

• Access other resources that are produced by the Academy (e.g., evidence-based resources
such as Clinical Practice Guidelines, Annotated EDGE Bibliography, fact sheets, etc..., and
Special Interest Group updates). Dissemination of information to members of the Academy
is made through email blast, via listserv, Facebook, and Twitter. It is suggested you sign up
for the listserv, and “like” or “follow” the Academy on social media.

• Investigate the current offerings of continuing education courses available on the Academy’s
website such as regional courses offered by the Academy, visit for more information:
http://oncologypt.org/education/, These courses provide education covering the breadth
and depth of a variety of settings and diagnoses in which Oncologic PTs currently work. The
Academy’s courses are evidence-based and frequently updated, so information is always
current and topical. Continuing education courses may count towards CEU requirements
in most states.

• Carefully choose continuing education courses that are NOT sponsored by either the
Academy, APTA or one of its other components. Though many advertise as oncologic PT
courses, one must make sure that the techniques and learning objectives actually represent
evidence-based care versus novel concepts and or unproven, complementary-type treatment
approaches. Furthermore, it is important that you are aware of the intended audience and
the instructor qualifications. These vary widely and definitely impact the level of instruction.

• Use PTNow. This is APTA’s invaluable resource and portal for evidence-based practice.
Members of APTA have access to >4,500 journals (full text); Rehab Reference Center (which
includes >1,000 peer reviewed clinical summaries, >11,500 drug fact sheets, patient
education materials on hundreds of diagnoses, the entire VHI exercise library, and more); a
searchable database for clinical practice guidelines, a searchable database for tests and
measures (fully interfaced with RehabMeasures.org), and more. This resource is an excellent
way to keep informed of evidence and to use as a point of care guide for daily patient

• Schedule a set number of hours each day or week to specifically study evidenced-based
literature and from the recommended texts (see end of this document).

- Evaluate and treat as many cancer survivors/patient/clients with varying diagnoses in your setting. Visit and observe in as many treatment settings as possible to have first-hand knowledge of the types of patients/clients and diagnoses treated by physical therapists in a variety of practice settings.

- Find a mentor. Someone who is currently an experienced PT in oncologic practice who is willing to share knowledge, materials, and time with you. Resources for finding experienced colleagues include:
  - APTA’s Find a PT consumer tool [http://aptaapps.apta.org/findapt](http://aptaapps.apta.org/findapt)
  - ABPTS Find a Specialist: [http://www.abpts.org/FindaSpecialist/](http://www.abpts.org/FindaSpecialist/) - Currently there are no board certified oncologic physical therapists but check back frequently after the examination is administered
  - APTA’s Member Directory; [http://aptaapps.apta.org/memberdirectory/](http://aptaapps.apta.org/memberdirectory/)

- Attend the APTA Combined Sections Meetings to become immersed in the field; attending courses, studying posters, visiting the Academy’s booth, talking to authors and authorities in the field, and receiving first-hand experience with the many therapists who have successfully attained certification in a related practice area such as geriatrics. [www.apta.org/csm](http://www.apta.org/csm)

- Join or form study groups with others in your area who are preparing to take the examination as well.

- Check if you can get access to e-books or printed copies of textbooks through your company or university’s library. Amazon and other online vendors may offer textbook rentals, which are frequently cheaper as compared to buying.

- Though the certification examination is heavily weighted in clinical practice, there may be questions related to health care policy, public health knowledge, management principles, etc. It is best to keep a broad perspective in these areas as this represents national viewpoints and not individual carrier or fiscal intermediary policies.

**Suggested Texts and Resources (not an exhaustive list):**

Textbooks:


Monographs


Journal Publications:

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1. **Rehabilitation Oncology**: More than 25 EDGE reviews on Clinical Outcome Measures and CPG on Secondary Upper Quadrant Lymphedema Diagnosis in Rehabilitation Oncology – look under collections tab on Journal homepage at: [https://journals.lww.com/rehabonc/Pages/collections.aspx?collection=Topical](https://journals.lww.com/rehabonc/Pages/collections.aspx?collection=Topical)


**Clinical Guidelines:**


**APTA Learning Center Courses:**


**Continuing Education Seminars:**


**Academy of Oncologic Physical Therapy Partners with Educata for Distance Education Course Hosting** – [www.educata.com](http://www.educata.com) or [http://oncologypt.org/education/educata-online-courses/](http://oncologypt.org/education/educata-online-courses/)


**World Confederation for Physical Therapy’s Network for HIV/AIDS, Oncology, Hospice and Palliative Care FREE recorded educational sessions** - [https://www.wcpt.org/ipt-hope](https://www.wcpt.org/ipt-hope)

**Highlighted Journal Articles: (grouped by topic for convenience but overlap may occur)** – This list is not designed be a mandatory reading list, but instead should be a guide to help a candidate to select readings that will help fill gaps in their individual knowledge base.

**Cancer Rehab - general**


27. Spelten ER, Sprangers MA, Verbeek JH. Factors reported to influence the return to work of cancer survivors: a literature review. Psychooncology 2002; 11(2):124-131


**Balance and Falls**


**Bone Health - Fracture and Osteoporosis**


**Breast Cancer**


**Breast Reconstruction**


Chemotherapy Induced Peripheral Neuropathy


**Exercise Prescription**


Fatigue
Head and Neck

14. van der Molen L, van Rossum MA, Burkhead LM, Smeele LE, Rasch CR, Hilgers FJ. A Randomized Preventive Rehabilitation Trial in Advanced Head and Neck Cancer Patients


**Hematological Cancers and BMT**


**Lung Cancer**


Lymphedema


**Melanoma**


**Modalities**


**Neurological and CNS**


**Ovarian Cancer**


Outcomes Measurement


**Palliative Care**


Pelvic Floor


Prospective Surveillance Model for Rehabilitation


**Prostate**


**Psychosocial and QOL**


Radiation Therapy

7. Sarcoma Limb Salvage

Scar Tissue