

Preparing for the Geriatric Clinical Specialist Exam

The Geriatric Clinical Specialist Exam, administrated by the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialist (ABPTS), is a certification process for physical therapists who are committed to providing the best evidence-based care to older adults. Preparation for the GCS exam requires a commitment of time, energy and focus to the entire process in order to be successful. This outline is designed to help you in your preparation for the specialist exam. It 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 Geriatric Specialist Certification and Advanced Proficiency Pathways for PTAs Committee (APTA Geriatrics) as a service to therapists taking the GCS exam and reflects not only its work, but also feedback of those who have taken the exam previously.

According to ABPTS, “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.” Board-Certified Geriatric Clinical 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 to a diverse clientele. Preparation for the exam must take into account the management of patients over a large age range (65+) and with complex acute and chronic medical histories.

To Begin Your Application Process:

1. Request all application materials from American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties (ABPTS) at <http://www.abpts.org>
2. Review requirements thoroughly and ensure that you have enough clinical hours in the specialty to sit for the exam or that you have satisfied the requirements to sit based on completion of an accredited residency program in geriatrics.
3. Create a timeline for yourself that includes time to complete the application process, gather resources, talk and collaborate with others, and thoroughly study for all the elements of the exam.
 - **Create a Timeline.** Evaluate the time you will need to prepare for the certification exam. Six months is most likely the minimum one should consider though everyone learns at different paces; this is a recommendation only.
 - **Schedule study time.** 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).

Suggestions for Studying for the Geriatric Clinical Specialist Exam

- **Review ABPTS Specialist Certification Candidate Guide.** There is no official preparatory course for the GCS exam. Sample questions are available in the information booklet provided by the 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. <https://specialization.apta.org/become-a-specialist/candidate-guide>
- **APTA Accredited Geriatric Clinical Residency Programs.** Enrollment in an APTA accredited Geriatric Clinical Residency Program is an excellent way to acquire the skills and knowledge that can help you be successful on the GCS exam. Residency programs are designed specifically to train graduates to become GCS's. These programs typically take about one year to complete and offer 1:1 mentoring throughout the year with experts, including GCS's. For a list of APTA accredited residency programs in geriatric PT, visit <https://accreditation.abptrfe.org/#/directory>
- **Description of Specialty Practice.** The Description of Specialty Practice on the APTA online store includes a self-assessment tool so you can determine areas to focus your review. <https://store.apta.org/geriatric-digital-download.html>
- **Examination Outline.** You can also use the examination outline as a guideline for review: <https://specialization.apta.org/become-a-specialist/geriatrics/specialist-certification-examination-outline-geriatrics>
- **APTA Geriatrics Membership.** Become a member of the Academy of Geriatric Physical Therapy (AGPT) to receive the peer reviewed Journal of Geriatric Physical Therapy (JGPT) and other resources that are produced by the Academy (e.g., evidence-based resources, GeriNotes, and Special Interest Group updates). The JGPT for the iPad is available on the Apple app store for free. Dissemination of information to members of the Academy is made through email blast, via listserv, Facebook, Twitter and RSS. It is suggested you sign up for the listserv, and "like" or "follow" the Academy on social media. There are multiple benefits of becoming a member, this includes access to multiple resources and discounts.
- **APTA Patient Care Resources.** APTA has patient care resources that includes content and tools previously housed at 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 management. <https://www.apta.org/patient-care/evidence-based-practice-resources>
- **Home Study Modules.** Acquire and study as many Home Study Modules produced by the Academy as possible. These courses provide education covering the breadth and depth of a variety of settings and diagnoses in which GCS Physical Therapists currently work. In particular, the FOCUS courses have been particularly helpful for many exam takers (per testimonials and survey results). The other courses are of excellent quality as well; the distinguishing feature of the FOCUS courses is that it specifically addresses all of the physical therapist practice patterns and has been cross-linked to the Description of Specialty Practice. The Academy updates all recurrent courses (e.g., the FOCUS Course Series) approximately every 5 years, so information is always current and topical. Home

Study courses can also count towards CEU requirements in most states.

<http://learningcenter.apta.org/student/MyCourse.aspx?id=14d72e66-b12f-429b-a842-5e328e618c78&programid=dcca7f06-4cd9-4530-b9d3-4ef7d2717b5d>

- **CEEEA®.** The Certified Exercise Expert is Aging Adults (CEEEA) is a 3-course series certification sponsored by APTA Geriatrics. The **CEEEA® credential allows PTs to demonstrate expert clinical decision-making skills in** Designing and applying an effective examination and exercise prescription; and measuring the effectiveness and reflecting the current evidence of exercise for all aging adults. Check and register for upcoming Certified Exercise Expert for Aging Adults (CEEEA™) course series in your area. <https://aptageriatrics.org/events/courses/ceeeaa/>
- **ACEEEA®.** The Advanced Credentialed Exercise Expert for Aging Adults course allows PTs to develop advanced clinical decision making skills by integrating and analyzing data collected during the physical therapy examination; the history (including consideration of Social Determinants of Health (SDOH), Review of Systems, Systems Review, and Tests and Measures). Check and register for upcoming Advanced Credentialed Exercise Expert for Aging Adults in your area. <https://aptageriatrics.org/events/courses/advanced-ceeeaa/>
- **Balance and Fall Prevention in Community Dwelling Older Adults.** This APTA Geriatrics sponsored 2 series course allows PTs to demonstrate current and comprehensive knowledge, expert analysis and clinical reasoning, mastery of psychomotor skills, and the capacity to advocate for fall prevention. Check and register for upcoming courses in your area. <https://aptageriatrics.org/events/courses/balance-fall-prevention-course/>
- **GeriNotes Exams.** *APTA Geriatrics members' benefit.* GeriNotes exams offer additional opportunities for continuing education in different topics affecting the geriatric population at no cost to APTA Geriatrics members. <https://aptageriatrics.org/continuing-education/gerinotes-ce-modules/>
- **APTA Geriatrics Webinars.** Geriatric webinars on different topics affecting the geriatric population. <https://aptageriatrics.org/events/webinars/>
- **Clinical Practice.** Evaluate and treat as many geriatric 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.
- **Journal of Geriatric Physical Therapy.** *APTA Geriatrics members' benefit.* Review archived issues of the JGPT: <http://journals.lww.com/jgpt/pages/default.aspx>

- **Geriatric courses and modules.** Investigate the current offerings of online courses available on the Academy's website: <http://learningcenter.apta.org/AdvancedSearch.aspx?KeyWord=Geriatrics>. Also, carefully choose continuing education courses that are NOT sponsored by either AGPT, APTA or one of its components. Though many advertise as geriatric 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. Caveat emptor!
- **APTA CSM.** Attend the APTA Combined Sections Meetings (CSM) to become immersed in the field; attending courses, studying posters, visiting the AGPT booth, talking to authors and authorities in the field, and receiving first-hand experience with the many therapists who have successfully attained certification.
- **Health Care Policy Resources.** Though the certification exam 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. Therefore, we suggest the best resource for policy learning and understanding Medicare implications is the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS). There are multiple self-paced, self-learning modules available. Since Medicaid criteria vary from state to state, it is unlikely questions will reflect this type of public programming. <https://www.cms.gov/outreach-and-education/medicare-learning-network-mln/mlnngeninfo/index.html>
- **Study Groups.** Join or form study groups with others in your area who are preparing to take the exam as well.
- **Online books.** 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.

Suggested Texts and Resources (not an exhaustive list)

- Avers D, Wong RA. Guccione's Geriatric Physical Therapy. 4th ed. St. Louis, MO. Elsevier; 2020. ISBN: 978-0-323-60912-8
- Academy of Geriatric Physical Therapy. Essential Competencies in the Care of Older Adults at the Completion of a Physical Therapist Postprofessional Program of Study. Available through APTA Geriatrics at <https://geriatricspt.org/essential-competencies/index.cfm>
- Academy of Geriatric Physical Therapy. Geriatric FOCUS. 2012. Available through the APTA Learning Center. Course Code: LMSK-0002.
<http://learningcenter.apta.org/student/MyCourse.aspx?id=7afda175-e9fe-4add-99bb-6c441e6178bd&programid=dcca7f06-4cd9-4530-b9d3-4ef7d2717b5d>
- American College of Sports Medicine. ACSM's Guidelines for Exercise Testing and Prescription. 9th ed. Baltimore, MD. Lippincott Williams and Wilkins; 2013. ISBN 13: 978-1609139551
- APTA. Self-Assessment Tool included with the Description of Specialty. Available free with exam registration or for purchase at:
<http://iweb.apta.org/Purchase/CatalogSearchResults.aspx?Option=1&ProductTypeText=All&ProductTypeValue=All&Title=DSP&Author=&ProductDesc=&TitleText=Item+Number+or+Title+contains&AuthorText=Author+Name+contains&ProductDescText=Item+Description+contains>
- Bottomley JM, Lewis CB. A Clinical Approach to Geriatric Rehabilitation. 4th ed. Thorofare, NJ. SLACK Incorporated; 2019. ISBN:978-1-63091-327-4
- Ciccone C. Pharmacology in Rehabilitation (Contemporary Perspectives in Rehabilitation). 5th ed. Philadelphia, PA. F.A. Davis; 2015. ISBN 13: 978-0803640290.
- Goodman C, Fuller K. Pathology: Implications for the Physical Therapist. 4th ed, St. Louis, Mo. Elsevier/Saunders; 2014. ISBN 13: 978-1455745913
- Kauffman T, Scott R, Barr J, Moran M. A Comprehensive Guide to Geriatric Rehabilitation. 3rd ed. Churchill Livingstone; 2014. ISBN 13: 978-0702045882.
- Lewis CB, Chui KK, Gray DL, Huber GM. *Physical Therapy for the Older Adult*. Baltimore, MD: Wolters Kluwer; 2017 ISBN: 9781496343338
- Medbridge Physical Therapy Courses related to Geriatrics. Available online at:
<https://www.medbridgeeducation.com/gcs-prep/>
- O'Sullivan S, Schmitz T, Fulk G. Physical Rehabilitation. 6th ed. Philadelphia, PA. F.A. Davis; 2013. ISBN 13: 978-0803625792
- Paz j, West M. Acute Care Handbook for Physical Therapists. 4th ed. St. Louis, Mo. Elsevier/Saunders; 2013. ISBN 13: 978-1455728961.
- Shumway-Cook A, Woollacott M. Motor Control: Translating Research into Clinical Practice. 4th ed. Lippincott Williams and Wilkins; 2011.
- Staples W. Geriatric Physical Therapy: A Case Study Approach. McGraw Hill; 2016. ISBN 13: 9780071825429.