

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES OF FOREIGN-TRAINED PHYSICAL THERAPISTS IN THE UNITED STATES

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Description and Purpose: Foreign-trained physical therapists (FTPT) play a role in helping to meet the demand of rehabilitation services in the United States (US) and other parts of the world. There is an ongoing discussion as to whether the use of FTPTs is an adequate and appropriate solution to meeting the demand for the void in rehabilitation services. The moral regard to this issue cannot be ignored. A balance must be met between saturating the market with too many physical therapists and protecting the public from improperly trained clinicians. The dilemma is how to balance personal autonomy, right to economic prosperity, right to professional development, and the expectations of the public in demanding adequate health care services.

Methods/ analysis: IRB approval was obtained, the identity and dignity of each patient was protected. This research project focuses on a qualitative approach to examine issues faced by FTPTs who are seeking licensure in the US. Descriptive phenomenological methods were used to analyze interviews of FTPTs on their professional experiences of working in the US.

Results: Language proficiency, educational backgrounds, and culture shock appear to be the greatest barriers for some FTPTs. FTPTs use a variety of strategies and resources to overcome these barriers with a variety of results.

Conclusion: Results from this study may help inform communities and organizations on how to best recruit and retain physical therapist professionals to meet the increasing diversity in the patient populations we serve. It is our hope that our research will open the discussion of the need to examine policy and ethical standards of practice to protect the public, maintain professional integrity, and address the need for diversity in our health-care system.