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## How to log observation hours for physical therapy

Observation hours (ObHr), also referred to as volunteer hours, shadowing, or paid hours,3 as required or recommended by several physical therapy (DPT and PTA) programs, are reported ... Use this tracking sheet to stay organized with your clinical observation hours. At the time, my mom worked in an orthopedic physical therapy clinic, so she helped me secure a shadowing experience. Okay thank you for saying that. I've read/heard to focus on settings but on this forum I felt that I was really lacking in my application just because I didn't have 1,000 hours as an aide in one place. Plan on sending many emails before you get any responses, so I recommend using this as a last resort. Volunteer department - Hospitals generally require you to sign up online through the volunteer department. I would not do more than 50-100h in pediatric setting. Members don't see this ad -> I think some people go pretty crazy with hours on this forum honestly. Don't write too much information on your application essays. Most of my time was spent cleaning and organizing the clinic instead of observing the therapists, so this was my least favorite of the experiences.Aquatics/Pediatrics (36 hours) - I volunteered through a community nonprofit which worked with children with special needs. I would recommend that you try to observe in at least 4-5 settings, and get around 20-30 hours in each (unless the program has a more specific requirement). Plus, this will show your interest in the field, and could potentially lead to a recommendation letter (which you will eventually need) if you form a good relationship! Do try to find graduates of your prospective program to shadow! This is a great way to network, and learn more about the program. Different programs have different requirements for observation hours. I watched treatments and asked thoughtful questions either during the treatment or right after, depending on what felt like a better time to ask. Just my opinion though! There are plenty of other ways to make your application shine without excess hours! Definitely adhere to the school's minimum required hours. Do try your best to make a good impression. I believe I'll have 100+ by the time applications open and I'm getting stressed! Members don't see this ad. These hours can be paid, or unpaid hours, as long as you are directly observing/shadowing a physical therapist. Would this be logged as observation hours on PTCAS? If you're unsure of what to do, just ask! Sometimes it's hard to be proactive if you're worried about getting in the way, but it gets easier over time. If this is too much for you to handle, try to set up shadowing experiences over the summer. Observation Do's Do keep track of each setting you observe at, the dates you were there, the therapist's name and contact information, along with the types of patients, injuries, tests, and interventions you see (like I listed above). Ask what they like and dislike about their job, other places they have worked, how much paperwork they are required to do, their thoughts on the future of physical therapy, etc. The diagnoses seen were predominantly orthopedic and neuromuscular (mainly post-surgical rehabilitation and/or chronic pain). I also recommend avoiding wearing too much cologne or perfume, or scented lotion. Thank every single patient for allowing you to shadow. I would not do more than 50 extra hours beyond the minimum requirement unless you have plenty of free time or are working in that kind of setting and so will get more hours anyway. In the hospital, it worked out better for me to ask questions when walking to another patient's room, or when they were typing up the paperwork on the computer between patients. Also, on this website I've seen many people list hundreds of observation hours. Gather all the relevant information and signatures during every shift so that you don't have to go back and ask for verification later. You must meet the requirement for each school in order to be considered for acceptance. I love that she had longer sessions (1.5 hours for evaluations and 1 hour for treatments), and she incorporated a lot of yoga into the treatments. Better do about 50h in 3 different settings/clinics. I saw how the therapists typed up their paperwork, and one of the aides walked me through the electronic medical record and asked what I would write down for one of the patients. I lit candles and made sure the music stayed on during sessions, so that was really different than every other setting (in a good way!). You cannot participate in anything, so it gets pretty boring. After observing just one treatment session, I knew that physical therapy was the career I wanted to pursue So you think you want to become a physical therapist huh? What are observation hours? You don't need hundreds of hours unless it's something that is emphasized by the school or you want to make up for something like a lower GRE score. It's for pre-PT students & includes involvement in physical therapies/workouts with the kids while a physical therapist is there. I accumulated 138 hours total, with at least 30 hours in each setting. This will look way better than having say 100-200 hours in one setting. Send them a private message and ask to shadow. Observing allows you to get to know a physical therapist, learn about the career field, and figure out if this is really something you want to pursue! This guide will give a general overview of the process and answer some commonly asked questions. However, I have also heard that some programs like to see wide variety of experiences vs large amounts of hours. Try to get 20-40 hours in different settings, rather than getting 100 hours in just clinic. If you are unable to visit, then calling or emailing will be totally fine! I honestly emailed every setting I observed at, but I made sure to tell them a little about myself, and my goals for the future. For example, in orthopedics, I just asked questions during the treatment because I usually talked to the patient and physical therapist, so it didn't feel out of place to ask. My top suggestion is to ask the clinic what their dress code is. 50h is plenty of time for that introduction. Each patient shares a room with another and some had been there for months, so they really liked talking about their lives and were generally easy to talk to. Some want 80 h, others 250. I observed the administration of outcome measures including the Berg Balance Test and the Timed Up and Go (TUG). You can choose more than one for each facility you observed at (for example, if the acute care hospital also had inpatient rehabilitation). I know a guy who has easily over 1000 hours in just one setting (he's worked there for a while) but he didn't get in his first 2 tries because of other factors. Does someone have their own cash-based private practice? Don't discuss patient information with anyone other than the therapist (HIPAA!). My program didn't have an observation hour or setting requirement, but they recommended that you have at least 100 hours in a variety of settings. Some programs specifically require a certain number of hours in outpatient and inpatient. Interventions implemented included manual manipulation, gait training, transfer training, stair training, lower and upper extremity strengthening exercises, balance re-education exercises, bed mobility training, Hoyer transfer training, and ultrasound. We were all given a printout of all the patients that needed to be seen, everyone updated the group on how the previous day's treatments went for each patient, and then everyone decided which area of the hospital they wanted to go. This setting was cool because the message and ask to shadow. Observing allows you to get to know a physical therapist, learn about the career field, and figure out if this is really something you want to pursue! This guide will give a general overview of the process and answer some commonly asked questions. However, I have also heard that some programs like to see wide variety of experiences vs large amounts of hours. Try to get 20-40 hours in different settings, rather than getting 100 hours in just clinic. If you are unable to visit, then calling or emailing will be totally fine! I honestly emailed every setting I observed at, but I made sure to tell them a little about myself, and my goals for the future. 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Acute Care HospitalRehabilitation HospitalSkilled Nursing FacilityOutpatient OrthopedicsSchoolWellness/FitnessOccupational HealthHome HealthOther Inpatient FacilityOther Outpatient Facility Here are the possible populations observed to choose from on PTCAS. Here are the setting types that PTCAS lists on their site: Acute Care Hospital Rehabilitation Facility Extended Care Facility/Nursing Home/Skilled Nursing Facility Free-standing Physical therapy or Hospital Outpatient Clinic School/Preschool Wellness/Prevention/Fitness Industrial/Occupational Health Home Health Most PTCAS programs have observation hour requirements, whether that be 50 hours or 100 hours. Try to be as active and helpful as possible! Between patients, there are a lot of things you can do. Bring a notebook with you when you shadow, so that you can write these things down as you go. Click here for a free downloadable spreadsheet to keep track of all your observation hours. Do arrive on time! Do adhere to the facility's dress code. These can be volunteer or paid (if you are a PT tech/aide), and you could be observing direct patient care, or helping out around the facility (i.e. doing laundry, cleaning treatment tables, or doing paperwork). Don't share patient details on social media or with family members. But other than that, QUALITY over quantity. You can choose more than one for each facility you observed at. Don't wait till the last minute to set up observation experiences. I walked with the therapist to the patient's room, watched patient transfers, and saw treatments in the main gym area. Outpatient Orthopedics (65 hours) - I volunteered at my school's health center, so I mostly saw students and some employees of the university. Volunteering hours don't count as shadowing/observing unless you are directly with a physical therapist.If you happen to clean a treatment table or fold laundry between shadowing patients or asking questions, then I would probably include this time in your hours. At the end of the day, thank each staff member for helping you learn. I showed up in the morning when all the PT's and aides were in the rehab room. The diagnoses seen were predominately orthopedic, genetic, metabolic, endocrine, developmental-behavioral, and neurodevelopmental, including Stroke, Autism, Hemiplegia, Ventriculomegaly, Hypotonia, and Ataxia. If your program requires let's say 100 h of observation, you do not have to go far beyond those hours. It was my senior year, and my health professions class required us to shadow a health-care provider for 10 hours. Try to avoid calling around lunch time or just before closing.Email - This is another option but it is likely that the email will be ignored. Once you've found a clinic you'd like to shadow at, you can either call, email, or visit. Yes this would count as observation hours! And while the hundreds of hours isn't technically necessary ( I applied with 450+) it is a major factor. Do let the facility know (if possible) if you have to miss a day. The diagnoses seen were predominantly neurologic, including Traumatic Brain Injury, Spinal Cord Injury, Stroke, Amputation, and Multiple Sclerosis. How do I find observation experiences? He was able to walk and talked a little bit, and he was really shy around the other kids. To explore the many avenues of physical therapy, I shadowed in: Outpatient Orthopedics (30 hours): The patient population varied (teenagers, adults, and geriatrics). There was a lot of downtime between patients, so I had a lot of time to ask her questions and play with her adorable 1 year old baby.Inpatient Acute Hospital (39 hours) - I volunteered here on my winter break for 2 weeks. I think some people go pretty crazy with hours on this forum honestly. The purpose of observation hours is to introduce you to a setting - that's it. They may be directly treating a patient, or you may be filing paperwork or cleaning treatment areas - it all depends as long as a PT is there to witness! Observing and shadowing are exactly the same thing. Now, that worries programs truthfully because this one Inpatient Rehabilitation Center halfway through, but still. Check the school's website, PTCAS website for each school, or the PTCAS Observation Hours Summary. Some want at least 1 outpatient and 1 inpatient settings for observations, others do not care. Google is a great place to start when looking for shadowing experiences. I recommend that you observe in an inpatient setting, whether or not it is required by the schools you will be applying to. It was so cool to see his progress and be a part of it.Fitness/Wellness (81 hours) - I observed here for 3-4 hours a week for one school year, but I really loved coming here! This PT converted the master bedroom in her house into a clinic, and she ran her cash-based business out of her house. This is not a just a recommended guideline, so double check what each school requires. Interventions implemented included manual manipulation, stair training, breathing training, motor learning, movement/mobility training, balance/coordination activities, the use of assistive technology, orthotics, developmental, recreational, and play therapy, and ultrasound. I had a lot of time to ask questions between patients, and I remember asking a lot about medical diseases, diagnoses, and abbreviations that were on the patient printouts. When you're getting your hours done, print out or download some sort of observation hours log so that you can document the amount of hours you do each day, and have your supervising PT ... In person - Few people will show up to a clinic in person, so you'll stand out as someone who really wants to shadow at that clinic. [QUOTE] Yeah... Many hospitals and nursing homes require scrubs, however volunteers may be able to wear business casual. I would recommend showing up in the morning, as that tends to be less busy. You'll be exposed to different patient populations, different treatment techniques, you'll get a better idea of what you're interested in, and you will have more physical therapists to potentially write you a letter of recommendation. If a majority of your time is spent away from patients and the therapist, then these hours do NOT count. A good amount of time may be 2 hours /week for 2 months, or 4 hours/day for 2 weeks. I will also give a summary of my experiences in the 5 settings in which I observed. I don't think I would like to work at this hospital in particular, but I'm interested in hospitals with pediatrics and more settings than this one Inpatient Rehabilitation Center (15 hours) - I only spent 15 hours here because I already had over 200 hours of observing. Luckily, a friend of mine applied to PT school a cycle before me + shared the places she shadowed at, so I ended up securing spots at two of them! My Experience The first time I shadowed a physical therapist was in high school. Each school will have their own requirements. I would suggest visiting the clinic if possible, as this will show that you are very interested in volunteering. Unless you are WORKING there and making money, there is really no need to be there for a long time since you end up just standing there watching therapists doing more or less the same thing over and over and over again. With the large number of students interested in physical therapy, settings fill up quickly (especially inpatient settings), so seek out opportunities early! For example, I inquired about shadowing at my local hospital in June, and there wasn't an open spot until November. I would recommend reaching out to those programs you're most interested in and just asking for more specifics on their observation hours requirements! Skilled Nursing/Extended-Care/Home Health (30 hours): The patient population was geriatric. Be prepared to wait until a therapist has free time to speak with you.Call - If showing up in person is not possible, calling is great too! Expect to call several places before you find somewhere to observe. Schools want you to be exposed to variety of settings to have a general understanding what PT is about; pediatric setting is a little bit too narrow to get too many hours in it. In addition, you can ask classmates or family members if they know of any places/physical therapists that you could shadow. Make sure you respect patient privacy and follow HIPAA guidelines. Volunteering in a hospital may include giving family members directions, taking phone calls, decorating, or helping in a gift shop. Most programs require verification of your hours as well, so the therapist will need to submit a signature online, or you can upload a paper signature. Only use it if it is an emergency, and be sure to notify the therapist if you need to take a phone call or text. Larger hospitals may have a waiting list, so try to get your inpatient hours as early as possible. Some hospitals also may require a long application with references, and may require you to be more active in the treatments. Still not sure what to ask? I company number and try to speak with a physical therapist.Network with physical therapists online - Try to make connections on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Updated 12/11/2019 Hello, I recently applied/heard back from an unpaid internship at a pediatric therapy clinic. Interventions implemented included manual manipulation, gait training, transfer training, stair training, lower and upper extremity strengthening exercises, balance re-education exercises, bed mobility training, and Hoyer lift transfer training. If you have shadowed for a long time over a few months, it could be nice to bring in a gift or a thank-you card. Some programs even have setting requirements, so make sure that you are checking the program's website/PTCAS site to ensure you meet their requirements (schools are usually pretty straight-forward and specific in regard to this information). Some kids were able to swim in the deeper end, but most of them were held in our arms as we moved them through the water and they played with toys and the other kids.My first semester, I was paired with two girls who were wheelchair-bound as they had a steel rod in their back, and they used a feeding tube so I had to be careful to make sure that water did not get in their mouths (which is pretty difficult because other kids LOVE splashing!). PTCAS has an article on how to submit your hours. I liked that I was able to observe with 5-6 different physical therapists and I saw different injuries. Here are the possible settings to choose from on the PTCAS application. Most outpatient clinics are business casual. Do ask questions! You are there to learn, and the therapist is there to help. It's almost the same as looking at any kind of numeric requirement, like maybe they only "require" a 300 total GRE score, but wouldn't it look all the better to have a 305-310 total? You can fold laundry, cleaned treatment rooms, organize equipment, talked to other staff members, read through the pt aide binder, jotted down notes on the patients I just saw, or talked to other patients that were in the room. If you're not sure, make sure you read the guidelines before you decide to share any interesting stories. If you're an aide, you may perform ultrasound or apply heat packs, or if you're volunteering you might follow behind a patient with a wheelchair. It's about the experience and what you learn. There were 6-10 patients in the gym at a time, so there was always something to watch. He was one of the youngest and had trouble swimming without his dad for the first month or so, but gradually became more confident and was playing with other kids and going underwater. After observing just one treatment session, I knew that physical therapy was the career I wanted to pursue. [QUOTE] while I definitely agree that after about 50 hours it starts to get a little repetitive, I spoke to a person in admissions at a program that explained it to me as/being- while their requirement is only 50/75/100/whatever, the more hours you have the more you would be "dedicated" in a sense to the field, meaning they know you've seen more of what they do and have a better grasp of the day to day and would hopefully therefore be less likely to drop out or decide you didn't like the work halfway through. Many patients were there for chronic conditions, which was different from the other settings I saw in which patients were recovering from surgery or recent injuries. Have a list of days and times when you are available BEFORE you call, and ask if any of those times are available. Yeah... Observation hours include paid and volunteer time spent with a physical therapist. Okay thank you for saying that, I've read/heard to focus on settings but on this forum I felt that I was really lacking in my application just because I didn't have 1,000 hours as an aide in one place. We met once a week for 1-2 hours, and each volunteer was paired up with one child. We said hello to our kids, helped them into the pool, did a group activity, then worked with our kid alone or in small groups, and then ended on another group activity. There were 4-5 different areas of the hospital, and I only saw patients who were recovering from surgery, broken a bone, or were older and had difficulty moving. Some patients are sensitive to fragrances and may have a bad reaction. It may take time to get all your hours completed, so don't stress if it takes you 1-2 years to get your hours. Inpatient Rehabilitation (30 hours): The patient population was primarily geriatric. The school I'm going to attend required 3 settings so I had a little over 100 hours from those 3 settings combined. In general, I recommend wearing: A nice shirt (doesn't need to be a button down, but avoid casual t-shirts or shirts with graphics / logos)PantsClosed toed shoesMinimal jewelry Make sure your shirts aren't too revealing, and try to cover up any tattoos you have. If you already meet the minimum hours for all your programs, try to diversify your number settings rather than racking up a bunch of hours at one clinic. I emailed 10-15 places to observe, and only received one positive response. A majority of the patients were over 70 years old because this was more of a rehabilitation hospital, so a lot of treatments were in the bed or were gait training down the hallway. I saw a lot of different patients, and I saw one or two patients often enough to see them progress and get to know about their lives. Doing this will help you out tremendously when it comes time to fill out your applications, as PTCAS requires some of this information. Hopefully you learned something new about observation hours! If you still have questions, feel free to email me (theurtyclinican@gmail.com), or DM me on Instagram anytime. General OrthopedicsNeurologicCardiovascular/PulmonaryIntegumentaryGeriatricsPediatricsSportsAquaticsWomen's HealthOther Call or message the facility where you want to observe and introduce yourself. Outpatient Pediatrics (48 hours): The patient population was pediatric. Focus on various experiences rather than quantity as long as you're meeting the school's minimum. Is this necessary? Interact with patients (without interfering with treatment of course), talk to therapists + other employees, help out as much as possible, and SMILE! Observation Don'ts Don't have your phone out while observing. If your school requires verification of these hours, you will also need an email address for one physical therapist at each facility. Inpatient physical therapy can look vastly different from outpatient settings, so it's good to see as much variety as possible. Come back on Tuesday to learn all about LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION! Most schools require some observation hours, which was definitely my favorite part about the entire application process. Well, to really know if this is the right field for you, you have to shadow! In this post, I will give a general overview of what observation hours are, share my personal experience, and give some general "do's and don'ts". Observation hours are hours spent observing/shadowing a physical therapist. It's not boring and you're not just standing in the corner staring at the physical therapist and patient (although this does happen some of the time). Okay thank you for saying that, I've read/heard to focus on settings but on this forum I felt that I was really lacking in my application just because I didn't have 1,000 hours as an aide in one place. Volunteering typically refers to the general term of helping out other people, whether it's folding laundry, organizing equipment, making handouts, helping with secretary duties, cleaning bathrooms, etc.

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