BACKGROUND: The National Board of Chiropractic Examiners (NBCE): Exam on “Physiotherapy”
The National Board of Chiropractic Examiners (NBCE) is the principal testing agency for the chiropractic profession. Established in 1963, the NBCE develops and administers standardized national examinations according to established guidelines.

The NBCE scores are among the criteria utilized by state licensing agencies to determine whether applicants satisfy state qualifications for licensure as a chiropractor. The NBCE formulates test plans according to information provided collectively by the chiropractic colleges, the state licensing agencies, field practitioners, subject specialists, and a Job Analysis of Chiropractic.

The optional NBCE “Physiotherapy Examination” may be taken following the completion of 120 hours of “physiotherapy coursework.” This exam is independent of Parts I, II, and III of the NBCE exam.

The NBCE “Physiotherapy Examination” was created in 1965 – prior to the creation of the NPTE, and predates the adoption of APTA’s position statement that the terms physical therapy and physiotherapy should be reserved for use by only licensed physical therapists. Attempts to convince the NBCE to rename this exam to date have been unsuccessful.

The Physiotherapy Examination consists of 92 standard multiple-choice questions and two case vignettes. Each case vignette includes three extended multiple-choice questions requiring three answers. To be eligible to take the Physiotherapy Examination, an applicant must have successfully completed 120 hours of instruction in physical rehabilitation, prior to the application late cutoff deadline. This instruction must be taken at and/or recognized by one of the 30 chiropractic colleges whose students are currently eligible to take the NBCE examinations. While exam is technically optional, twenty-five state chiropractic licensure board specifically mention the NBCE Physiotherapy Exam as a requirement for state licensure.

The taking and successful passage of the NBCE Exam on Physiotherapy does NOT grant a chiropractor the right to refer to themselves as a “physical therapist” or “physiotherapist,” nor does it necessarily allow them to advertise or call their services “physical therapy” or “physiotherapy.”

The protection of who may utilize these terms and titles is based each individual states’ law. Some states provide specific protection on the advertising and use of terms “physical therapy” and/or “physiotherapy.” (reserving the use of these terms to only licensed physical therapists). To view a summary of the status of term protection laws in the U.S. click HERE.

State statutes and regulations also determine the scope of clinical procedures chiropractors may legally perform in their respective jurisdictions. Providing care for musculoskeletal conditions using manipulation or adjustment as a primary intervention is within the legal scope of chiropractic practice in all 50 States. The legal right to use other procedures including rehab modalities, myofascial work, acupuncture, massage, nutritional therapy, etc. varies from state to state.

APTA and its state chapters will continue to advocate for state laws that provide explicit protection of the terms “physical therapy” and “physiotherapy” in all U.S. jurisdictions.