Audio file

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Transcript

00:00:02 Casey Ellis

Welcome to the Pre-Professional Playbook podcast, where preparation and hard work come together.

00:00:07 Casey Ellis

This podcast explores pathways in the health and law professions to help you format your future.

00:00:12 Casey Ellis

I'm your host, Casey Ellis, an advisor in the University of Georgia's Pre-Professional Advising Office.

00:00:17 Casey Ellis

Whether you're just starting out, considering a career shift, or just wanting to know more, this episode is your guide to navigating the various educational and professional options available.

00:00:27 Casey Ellis

Today we are discussing the field of physical therapy, where getting started is all about taking the right steps toward a strong foundation, because when it comes to your career, a strong beginning is the key to peak performance.

00:00:37 Casey Ellis

Whether you're looking to break into the field or strengthen your understanding of the profession, we're here to help you expand your knowledge and build a solid game plan for success.

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Physical therapists are licensed healthcare professionals who help people move better, recover from injuries, and manage pain so that they can stay active and independent.

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They work with individuals of all ages, from young athletes recovering from sports injuries to older adults looking to maintain mobility and prevent falls.

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Whether someone is dealing with a chronic condition, recovering from surgery, or experiencing movement limitations due to an illness or injury, PTs play a crucial role in getting them back to doing what they love.

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Beyond individual treatment, PTs work in a variety of settings, including hospitals, outpatient clinics,

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rehabilitation centers, schools, and even sports facilities.

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They collaborate with doctors, occupational therapists, trainers, and other healthcare professionals to ensure their patients receive comprehensive care.

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Whether theyre helping someone regain strength after surgery, teaching injury prevention techniques, or designing wellness programs for long-term health, PTs are dedicated to improving movement and enhancing quality of life.

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Physical therapists take a big picture approach to care.

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They start by getting to know your history, watching how you move, and running a few tests to figure out what's going on.

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From there, they put together a treatment plan designed around your diagnosis and goals.

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That plan might include targeted exercises, stretches, hands-on techniques, or even specialized equipment, all aimed at improving movement and managing pain.

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But it's not a rigid checklist.

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PTs keep an eye on your progress and make changes as needed to keep you moving in the right direction.

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Education is a big part of the process too.

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They help you understand your recovery, teach you ways to prevent future injuries, and sometimes even bring in your family to support your progress.

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They also work closely with doctors, trainers, and other healthcare professionals to make sure you're getting comprehensive care.

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When you step into the day-to-day environment of a physical therapist, you'll find that it's fast-paced, hands-on, and often full of variety.

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Whether you're working in a clinic, a hospital, or a rehabilitation center, the work setting is usually dynamic, with PTs interacting directly with patients in a physical space designed for movements.

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In outpatient clinics, for example, you might be in a large open area with treatment tables, exercise equipment, and sometimes even specialized machines for therapy.

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You'll be on your feet a lot, walking between patients.

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leading them through exercises, and making adjustments to their treatment plans in real time.

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The environment is often collaborative, with PTs working alongside physical therapy assistants, office staff, and sometimes doctors or other healthcare professionals.

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In hospital settings, the environment is a bit more formal, and you may work with patients in their rooms or rehabilitation areas.

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You could find yourself helping patients who are recovering from surgery or injury.

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And the work can involve a lot of hands-on techniques, like helping patients with mobility or teaching them how to use assistive devices.

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In these settings, the pace can be more unpredictable and you may need to adapt to a wide variety of patient needs.

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If you're working in a sports clinic or with athletes, the environment might have a more high-energy, performance-driven vibe.

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Here, you'll focus on helping athletes recover from injuries or improve their performance, often in a setting that includes gym equipment or training areas.

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No matter where you work, expect your environment to be patient-focused and hands-on.

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There's a lot of personal interaction, which means a mix of challenges, rewards, and learning opportunities.

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You'll need to be adaptable, as every patient's needs are different.

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And while the work can be physically demanding, it's also incredibly rewarding to see patients make progress under your care.

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Physical therapy care is available in a wide range of modalities and settings.

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While not exhaustive, let's discuss some main areas.

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Some main areas of interest include home health, hospice and palliative care, primary care, hospital settings, private practice, skilled nursing facilities, and school-based physical therapy.

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Home health PT is not only convenient but it is equally as effective as the care patients get in a hospital or skilled nursing facility.

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The beauty of home health PT is that PTs work one-on-one with patients in their own environment, making it specialized towards the patient's needs and goals.

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The reason physical therapy can be so valuable in hospice care is that it helps patients maintain their independence and movement for as long as possible.

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A PT works closely with the patient to understand their specific needs and challenges, finding ways to help them move around safely, whether its getting in and out of bed, transferring between chairs, or using the bathroom.

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By focusing on comfort and mobility, PTs ensure that patients can maintain their dignity and quality of life during a difficult time.

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It's all about supporting the patient's ability to move with more ease and confidence while also enhancing safety in their daily routines.

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Some people may need rehab in a hospital setting before being allowed to go home or to an extended care facility.

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Some problems the hospital can help with include stroke, spine injury, pain, joint conditions, and other conditions.

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The hospital is a great setting for rehab because there is no weight.

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Physical therapy starts right away.

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For example, with spine injuries and strokes, the quicker you can get into PT, the better chance a patient has at limiting damage and shortening recovery time.

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Physical therapy can help with pain management post-op, whether that is from injuries, joint conditions, or other conditions such as cancer, heart disease, or even lung problems.

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Private practice physical therapy offers PTs more control over patient care, scheduling, and treatment approaches in a personalized clinic setting.

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These clinics treat a wide range of patients, from athletes to individuals recovering from surgery or managing chronic pain.

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PTs in private practice often take on additional roles in business operations, allowing for greater flexibility, specialization, and long-term patient relationships.

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Physical therapists and skilled nursing facilities help patients regain mobility and independence after illness, injury, or surgery, often working with older adults recovering from strokes or fractures.

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They focus on improving strength, balance, and function while collaborating with a team of healthcare professionals to provide personalized care.

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This setting offers a rewarding opportunity for PTs who enjoy long-term rehabilitation and making a lasting impact on patients' quality of life.

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Physical therapists in schools are different from your standard PT as they help children have equal access to education that would otherwise be difficult to achieve as a result of a student's disability.

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They work with children who may have physical, developmental, or sensory challenges that affects their ability to participate in school activities, from classroom tasks to sports.

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They collaborate with teachers, parents, and other healthcare professionals to create individualized therapy plans, often working within the classroom or school environment.

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A PT will choose one or more physical therapy specialties throughout their career, demonstrating expertise in areas they are passionate about and advancing their credentials.

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As of June 2023, more than 37,000 PTs in the United States have certified specializations.

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While the credentials for certifications can vary, there are certain requirements that must be met by all candidates.

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First, PTs must obtain licensure to practice PT in the United States.

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Next, they must pay the application review fee of $535 for American Physical Therapy Association members or $800 for non-APTA members prior to July 1.

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Then, they need to submit an individual application for each certification they wish to obtain.

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Finally, they must pass the clinical specialty exam, which is $810 for APTA members and $1,535 for non-members.

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The American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties recognizes ten areas of specializations.

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The first specialization is cardiovascular and pulmonary clinical specialist.

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This specialty was the first of all the different types of specialties to be board-certified.

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Cardiovascular and pulmonary specialists help patients manage heart and lung conditions, such as recovering from heart attacks or open-heart surgery, as well as managing respiratory diseases such as COPD.

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The second specialization is geriatric clinical specialists.

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This specialty is becoming more and more relevant due to the increasing aging population in the U.S.

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Geriatric clinical specialists help patients with musculoskeletal conditions such as arthritis and osteoporosis as well as neuro diseases like Alzheimers and Parkinsons.

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Orthopedic clinical specialists is our third specialization.

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Orthopedics has been the most popular type of PT, with over 21K certified specialists in the United States since June 2023.

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Orthopedic specialists treat injuries in conditions of the bone, muscle, tendons, ligaments, and joints.

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Fourth, we have

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neurological clinical specialists.

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PTs who focus on neurology treat patients with developmental, system, and traumatic disorders that affect patients' neuromuscular system.

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The specialty has much fewer certified specialists, with only 4,557 PTs in this area of practice as of June 2023.

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And fifth, we have the popular specialty of pediatric clinical specialists.

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Pediatric specialists treat physical conditions, from infants to children.

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Pediatric specialists often see young patients with conditions such as cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, and other stuff.

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Sixth, we have one that you may have not thought of: oncology specialists.

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Oncology specialists study the treatment of various types of cancer and work with patients who are undergoing cancer treatment.

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In seventh, we have a more niche specialty: women's health specialists.

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This is a newer specialization in physical therapy.

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PTs in this area often help women experiencing pelvic region issues.

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In eighth, we have a specialty you may have never heard of: electrophysiologic clinical specialist.

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This is one of the newer PT specialties.

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ECSs use electrical techniques to help diagnose and treat movement and nerve problems.

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They use electricity to monitor, measure, or stimulate the body's responses to improve function and relieve symptoms.

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In 9th, we have another popular specialty, sports clinical specialists.

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Sports clinical specialists treat both recreational and professional athletes all the way up to Olympians.

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These specialists are expert in injury management and rehab, which makes it a great option as there are a multitude of career options available.

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Finally, the 10th specialty is wound management specialists.

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This is the newest specialty as of 2022.

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A PT who specializes in this type of PT helps ensure wounds heal appropriately and assist patients in their recovery.

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PT programs may require the following prerequisite coursework.

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This is not an exhaustive list as requirements vary by program.

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Remember that it is the applicant's responsibility to ensure completion of all prerequisites.

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Course requirements for PT programs typically include:

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Principles of Biology 1 with Lab, Biology 1107 one year of Freshman Chemistry with Lab, Chem 1211 and 1212 one year of Introductory Physics with Lab, Physics 1111 and 1112 one semester of Introductory Statistics, Stat 2000 one year of Anatomy and Physiology with Lab, C Bio 2200 and 2210 one semester of Introductory Psychology, Psych 1101

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One semester of introductory behavioral science.

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Anthropology 1102 or Sociology 1101 are the ones most students choose from, but there are a lot of choices.

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Recommended courses include Principles of Biology 2 with Lab, Biology 1108, which is common for out-of-state schools and some in-state, one semester of Medical Terminology, CLAS 1030, as 43 programs in the United States require this course.

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One semester of nutrition, Nutrition 2100, which only two schools in the United States need according to PTCAS.

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One semester of lifespan development from birth through death, HDFS 2200.

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One semester of abnormal psychology, Psych 3230.

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Many schools require two psychs and this is the preferred choice.

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You'll most likely need to take the GRE.

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This test is divided into 3 sections, verbal, quantitative, and analytical writing.

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You can do it in Clark Howell Hall or from the comfort of your own home online with a live proctor.

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This test can be taken multiple times and then super scored.

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It is $220, though there are fee reduction programs that can be used.

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Another test that may be required is the CASPER exam.

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The CASPER exam is required of a few schools and consists of dilemmas and ethical questions to judge how a student will behave in certain situations and assesses their critical thinking skills.

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This is not a pass or fail test, and each school determines how they use the scores, and what is competitive for one school may not be for another.

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This is an online test with 14 stations and a different evaluator for each station.

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This test is $85 and requires an additional fee of $18 if sending it to other programs.

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PTCAS, or the Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service, is the centralized application system used for applying to doctor of physical therapy programs in the United States.

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It streamlines the application process by allowing applicants to submit a single application to multiple programs.

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Through PTCAS, applicants provide personal information, academic history, observation hours, letters of recommendation, personal statements, and other required materials.

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Each DPT program may have specific prerequisites and additional requirements, so it's important to check individual program details.

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PTCAS opens every June and stays open through June of the following year, but schools often have deadlines where their applications close before then.

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It is good to apply as early as possible to have a competitive edge.

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It is $170 for the first program you apply to and $70 for each additional program.

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Some schools will then have you pay another supplemental application fee.

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This fee can vary in price.

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A strong PT application isn't just about meeting the basic requirements.

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It's about proving you have the skills, experience, and dedication to go the distance.

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Your GPA and coursework might get you on the roster, but they won't be enough to carry you to victory.

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Admissions committees want to see that you've put in the work beyond the classroom.

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Just like in sports, practice, and real world experience matter.

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Shadowing, volunteering, part-time jobs, and leadership roles show that you're not just going through the motions.

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You're actively training for a career in physical therapy.

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Strong communication skills, teamwork, and the ability to adapt under pressure are just as important as knowing the science behind movement.

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At the end of the day, PT schools are looking for well-rounded players, not just star students.

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They want applicants who are ready to step onto the field and make an impact.

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So let's break down the key plays that will help your application stand out and get you to the next level.

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Shadowing requirements vary by school.

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but it is recommended to have around 100 hours total between three to four different settings.

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It is best to have both inpatient and outpatient settings with no less than 20 hours per setting.

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Of course, if you only gain 15 to 20 hours in a setting, that will not be who you want to ask for a letter of recommendation.

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Diversity of shadowing shows that you are well-informed about the profession and have taken time to explore the profession thoroughly.

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This demonstrates open-mindedness and prepares you for the variety you will encounter in PT school.

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It also allows you to figure out what kind of work excites you and where your strengths lie.

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This in turn helps you talk about your experiences in an insightful and reflective manner in both the application and interviews.

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Remember to record your hours in a log and have them signed off by the PTU shadow.

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Volunteering shows empathy and a service mindset not just for your future patients, but people in general.

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Volunteering does not have to be PT related.

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Aim for one to two hours a week, engaging face-to-face with an underserved community.

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Be consistent with who you volunteer for and remember to keep up with your hours and information for the community you volunteer for as you will need this on the application.

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You will be required to have three recommenders when applying to PT school.

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Each school may differ on who counts as a recommender and the details of each, but in general, you will want one recommendation from a licensed physical therapist, one recommendation from a supervisor or collegiate coach, one recommendation from a professor.

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You will want letters from people who truly know your character and strengths.

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You will want to waive your right to see the letters as it shows honesty and no biases.

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If a school uses PTCAS, then your recommender will submit through that platform.

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If your school is not on PTCAS, you will have your recommender send their letter to that school directly.

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You have the chance to talk about extra activities you have done outside of class in college and how these experiences have shaped you.

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Get involved in activities that are enjoyable to you.

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If you enjoy it and are actively involved, then it is considered meaningful.

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This could be jobs, clubs, study abroad, research, intramural sports, or whatever you fill your time with.

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This isn't just about hitting all the bases, but it's also about enjoying the game while you run them.

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This is a chance to show schools who you are as a person and that there is more to you than a love of physical therapy.

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According to the U.S.

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Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of physical therapists is projected to grow 14% from 2023 to 2033.

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The median annual wage for PTs was $99,000 in May of 2023.

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The lowest 10% of workers earned around $72,000, with the highest earning more than $130,000.

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Physical therapy is a great profession, not only for the job outlook and income potential, but also in the tangible way you can make a difference in people's lives with plenty of room to grow and explore specialties that excite you.

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Remember, progress in PT is all about putting in the reps, staying consistent, and playing the long game.

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Whether you're strengthening your form as a future PT or running the extra mile for your patients, every step counts.

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Keep your eye on the ball, stay dedicated, and trust the process.

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Don't forget to subscribe, leave a review, and share this episode with your teammates and colleagues.

00:19:03 Casey Ellis

Catch you next time on the Pre-Professional Playbook podcast.