

## Module 9

---

# Scope of Practice for Health and Fitness Professionals

---

### Learning Objectives

1. Learn the definition of proper scope of practice for health and fitness professionals
2. Learn the difference between what a physician does and a health/fitness professional

## Chapter Nine

# Scope of Practice for the Health and Fitness Professional

The health and fitness professional can play a vital role in the overall health and well-being of one who has Multiple Sclerosis. As a health and fitness professional, one should understand the extent of his/her scope of practice and be able to identify when a referral to a healthcare provider would be appropriate to avoid legal implications and potential injuries to his/her clients (Kompf, J., Tumminello, N., and Nadolsky, S., 2014).

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) and the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) have delineated the specific job description of a personal trainer or health and fitness professional.

According to the ACSM: The ACSM Certified Personal Trainer (CPT) works with apparently healthy individuals and those with health challenges who are able to exercise independently to enhance quality of life, improve health-related physical fitness, performance, manage health risk, and promote lasting health behavior change. The CPT conducts basic pre-participation health screening assessments, submaximal aerobic exercise tests, and muscular strength/endurance, flexibility, and body composition tests. The CPT facilitates motivation and adherence as well as develops and administers programs designed to enhance muscular strength/endurance, flexibility, cardiorespiratory fitness, body composition, and/or any of the motor skill related components of physical fitness (i.e., balance, coordination, power, agility, speed, and reaction time).

According to the NSCA: Personal trainers are health/fitness professionals who, using an individualized approach, assess, motivate, educate, and train clients regarding their health and fitness needs. They design safe and effective exercise programs, provide the guidance to help clients achieve their personal health/fitness goals and respond appropriately in emergency situations. Recognizing their own area of expertise, personal trainers refer clients to other healthcare professionals when appropriate. Personal trainers should fulfill a specific role within the healthcare system and as a healthcare provider. Trainers should have a strong knowledge base in kinesiology, psychology, injury prevention, nutrition, and knowledge of simple medical screening tests. Because of this, they may share certain roles with other healthcare providers such as dietitians, physical therapists, doctors, and psychologists.

It is necessary for health and fitness professionals to identify two major components of their profession; research and practical application of that research. In other words, evidence base training must be applied. In addition, the health and fitness professional must take into consideration the population he/she is training and apply proper methodology or intervention.

When working with clients who have MS, health and fitness professionals should focus specifically on exercise screening and prescription. The health and fitness professional can also have general training in injury management, psychology, and nutrition. Given the appropriate educational background, health and fitness professionals may play a role in working with populations with specific medical impairments such as MS.

## **Injured Clients**

Physical therapists and orthopedic specialists work specifically to fix what is broken or severely injured, whereas health and fitness professionals work to enhance what is not broken. Training clients consists of assessing for weaknesses and improving upon those weaknesses while working around what is severely injured or broken. Diagnosis and using corrective exercises for injuries is in the scope of the physical therapist and/or orthopedic specialist. The health and fitness professional should follow two criteria when prescribing exercise: 1. Comfort: Movement is pain-free, feels natural, and works within the client's current physiology 2. Control: The client can demonstrate the movement technique and body positioning as provided in each exercise description. To allow for comfort and control, the health and fitness professional may have to modify the range of motion or adjust body alignment to best fit the client's current ability and anatomy.

## **Psychology and Nutrition Counseling**

The personal training profession has a solid base not just in exercise, but in nutrition as well. However, a personal trainer is not qualified like a Registered Dietitian (RD), who can write meal plans for clients. Nutrition is related to psychology in that most clients have a fair and very general understanding of what they need to do to improve their eating habits. The real question is why do they not take the steps to become healthy? Health and fitness professionals should be able to disseminate information on nutrition, serve as counselors to behavior change, and act as a motivator for health change. This can all be done without writing a specific meal plan for a client. Health and fitness professionals can implement an effective change protocol to be used to hasten behavior change.

## **Medical Care and Special Populations**

Practicing medicine is not within the scope of practice for the health and fitness professional. However, there are certain conditions that could be easily screened by a health and fitness professional especially if a client does not spend much time with their physician or even go to their physician regularly. Health and fitness professionals encourage a healthy all-around lifestyle, which includes diet, exercise, and even sleep. As the obesity epidemic continues, so do the comorbid conditions that accompany it, including osteoarthritis, diabetes, hypertension, and obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). Health and fitness professionals could ask questions from validated questionnaires to know when to refer to a doctor. See the section on "Screening and Assessments".

Table 9.1 provides an overview of what a personal trainer does and does not do. It is important for all health and fitness professionals to be familiar with local bylaws on scope of practice, as they may be different depending on where the health/fitness professional lives (IDEA Health & Fitness Association, 2001).

<b>Personal Fitness Trainers DO NOT:</b>	<b>Personal Fitness Trainers DO:</b>
<b>Diagnose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive exercise, health, or nutrition guidelines from a physician, physical therapist, registered dietitian, etc.</li> <li>• Follow national consensus guidelines for exercise programming for medical disorders</li> <li>• Screen for exercise limitations</li> <li>• Identify potential risk factors through screening</li> <li>• Refer clients to an appropriate allied health professional or medical practitioner</li> </ul>
<b>Prescribe</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design exercise programs</li> <li>• Refer clients to an appropriate allied health professional or medical practitioner for an exercise prescription</li> </ul>
<b>Prescribe diets or recommend specific supplements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide general information on healthy eating according to the MyPlate Food Guidance System</li> <li>• Refer clients to a dietitian or nutritionist for a specific diet plan.</li> </ul>
<b>Treat injury or disease</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer clients to an appropriate allied health professional or medical practitioner for treatment</li> <li>• Use exercise to help improve overall health</li> <li>• Help clients follow physician or therapist advice</li> </ul>
<b>Monitor progress for medically referred clients</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document progress</li> <li>• Report progress to an appropriate allied health professional or medical practitioner</li> <li>• Follow physician, therapist, or dietitian recommendations</li> </ul>
<b>Rehabilitate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design an exercise program once a client has been released from rehabilitation</li> </ul>
<b>Counsel</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coach</li> <li>• Provide general information</li> <li>• Refer clients to a qualified counselor or therapist</li> </ul>
<b>Work with patients</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with clients</li> </ul>

Table 9.1