



**U. S. Public Health Service  
Office of Emergency Readiness**

***Office of Force Readiness and Deployment  
(OFRD)***

**A Guide for the Deployment  
of Therapist Officers**

AUGUST 2004

U.S. Public Health Service  
Therapist Professional Advisory Committee  
(TPAC)

## Disclaimer

This document provides guidance on the Therapist Professional Advisory Committee's (TPAC) current views on USPHS Therapists actual and potential deployment roles in disaster situations. Strategies may vary as the situation changes. TPAC will review this handbook periodically and modify its content according to updated information and feedback.

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# “ Guide to the Therapist Category

## Introduction

Disaster response requires the succinct utilization of highly trained and rapidly deployable professionals who can excel at every challenge. USPHS Therapists are a cadre of highly trained health care professionals who serve in clinical and non-clinical in either forward or rear echelon positions. This guide outlines essential skills held by each discipline in the Therapist Category.

## Overview of Capabilities

The Therapist Category is a group of highly skilled, multifaceted health care professionals who are fully qualified to practice in their respective profession: Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech-Language Pathology, and Audiology.

### Physical Therapists

**Definition:** Physical therapists are experts in the examination and treatment of musculoskeletal, neuromuscular, and integumentary pathologies that affects peoples' ability to function. They treat such pathologies and disabilities in hospitals, rehabilitation clinics, and in austere environments.

**Credentialing:** Physical therapists are licensed professionals with Baccalaureate, Masters or Doctoral degree from approved academic programs. Physical therapists may also be Board-Certified clinical specialists in: cardiovascular and pulmonary, clinical electro-physiology, geriatrics, neurology, orthopedics, pediatrics, and sports by the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties.

Other Recognized Board Certifications: Certified wound care specialist, certified strength and conditioning specialist, certified hand therapist.

### Occupational Therapists

**Definition:** Occupational Therapists are skilled professionals who provide treatment for the social, emotional and physiological effects of illness and injury for people across the lifespan. They provide acute to chronic treatment for people in diverse settings: hospitals, schools, clinics, worksites, communities and on the front line.

**Credentialing:** Occupational Therapists are licensed professionals with a Baccalaureate, Masters, or Doctoral degree from approved academic programs. Occupational Therapists may also be Board Certified as clinical specialists in Geriatrics, Neurorehabilitation and pediatrics through the American Occupational Therapy Specialties Board

Other Recognized Board Certifications: Certified Hand Therapist

## **Speech Language Pathologists:**

**Definition:** Speech and Language Pathologists are Licensed professionals and board certified to clinically diagnose / treat speech, language, cognitive, and swallowing disorders associated with traumatic head injury, stroke, cancer, bio-chemical poisoning, and altered mental status.

**Credentialing:** The American Speech Language and Hearing Association (ASHA) awards a nationally accepted Certificate of Clinical Competency in Speech and Language Pathology upon completion of a degreed program from an accredited university. As well as successful completion of Certificate of Clinical Competency (CCC) granted by ASHA.

## **Audiologist:**

**Definition:** Audiologists are autonomous Health Care Professionals who identify, assess, and manage disorders of the auditory, vestibular, and other neural systems across the entire life span.

**Credentialing:** The American Speech Language and Hearing Association (ASHA) awards a nationally accepted Certificate of Clinical Competency in Audiology upon completion of a degreed program from an accredited university. In all states except Idaho, Michigan and Vermont audiologists are licensed, registered or certified by the state in which they practice.

## **Therapist Disaster Related Knowledge & Skills**

Therapists have made significant contributions toward effective and efficient responses to disaster and emergency situations through their extensive general and specific knowledge and skills. All Therapists, at a minimum, must be basic OFRD qualified. Therapists are encouraged to develop and maintain additional skills in the following areas:

**Clinical Skills:**

BCLS certification, First Aid, First Responder Certification (preferred), EMT Certification (preferred), Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS preferred), field management of mass casualties, medical history & interviews, and medical triage, etc. Minimal logistical support and equipment are required by the therapists to provide patient care in any setting. The equipment for treating neuro-musculoskeletal injuries is already a standard part of the logistical cache' and hence no additional supplies are necessary.

**Therapist Emergency Clinical Skills to include but not limited to:**

1. Primary care for emergency and non-emergency Neuro-musculoskeletal injuries. (PT& OT)
2. Recommend appropriate medications (NSAIDS and non-narcotic Analgesics (only with-in scope of credentials)(PT & OT)
3. Order/review plain X-rays (with- in scope of care)
4. Apply athletic tape, immobilization bracing (with in scope of practice) to wrist/hands/fingers/elbow, knee and ankle.(PT & OT)
5. Make return to duty determinations.
6. Perform blister care and promote blister prevention. (PT)
7. Perform wound and minor burn care. (PT)
8. Perform orthopedic triage. (PT & OT)
9. Apply spine mobilization techniques. (PT)
10. Understand role with-in the EMS/DMAT CONOPS.
11. Make evacuation recommendations.
12. Conduct injury prevention.
13. Conduct fitness testing.
14. Collect epidemiological data.
15. Provide extended/in-patient care as needed.

**Other Disaster Related Skills:** Therapists are encouraged to qualify for deployment roles available to all categories in general, for example: Communications Officer, Emergency Coordinator Augmentee, Epidemiologist, Liaison Officer, Medical Records Administrator, SNS Officer, Emergency Medical Technician, Safety Officer and General Health Educator in addition to their role as the clinical specialist in their particular discipline. These roles however, require some additional training and education.

## Physical Therapist

### Description

Evaluate and treat Musculoskeletal, neuromuscular and integumentary physical impairments or disabilities resulting from injury or disease. Provide physical therapy services to response personnel as needed.

### Skills

- ✚ Provide emergency support in conditions ranging from the austere/field to fixed facility. Examples include situations such as a natural or man-made disaster, humanitarian assistance, or augmentee to fixed facility with an intact infrastructure.
- ✚ Provide neuromusculoskeletal evaluation and treatment.
- ✚ Restore body function and minimize pain/suffering.
- ✚ Address clinical problems such as:
  - Muscular, skeletal, neurological injury.
  - Burns and Wound care.
  - Apply and fabricate splints and other orthotics.
  - Knowledge of Ergonomics.
  - Provide Pain Management.
- ✚ Manage stress and adapt to changing situations.
- ✚ Maintain accurate documentation and communication of information.
- ✚ Apply the principles of infection control, universal precautions and aseptic technique as needed.
- ✚ Understand professional limitations in knowledge, skills and, ability, and seeks appropriate assistance when needed.

### Qualifier

Completion of PT degree from APTA approved program.

Current state licensure.

Clinical Currency: A minimum of 112 hours of experience as physical therapist annually.

### Other Indicators

First Responder, ACLS, Triage, Mass Casualty Training, C-4, CHART, DART, Athletic Trainer Certificate, US Army Joint Operational Deployment Course, US Army Musculoskeletal Evaluator Course, US Army Burn and Trauma Course.

## Occupational Therapist

### Description

Evaluate, plan, supervise and intervene to correct, prevent, or retard impairments or disabilities resulting from injury, disease, or occupational performance related problems. Provide Occupational Therapy services for response personnel as needed.

### Skills

- ✚ Provide emergency support in conditions ranging from the austere/field to fixed facility. Examples include situations such as a natural or man-made disaster, humanitarian assistance, or fixed facility with an intact infrastructure.
- ✚ Apply the principles of professional occupational therapy practice to support health, maximize performance and minimize pain and suffering:
  - ▣ Provide clinical evaluation, treatment, consultation, education, and training
  - ▣ Promote, restore, modify, or maintain participation in occupational roles including, but not limited to family, work, leisure, home maintainer and daily activities
  - ▣ Address occupational dysfunction relating to neurological, muscular, skeletal, amputation, thermal damage to the skin, sensory, cognitive, psychosocial or stress problems
  - ▣ Provide adaptive equipment, assistive technology, and fabricate splints and other orthotics to facilitate occupational performance.
  - ▣ Promote use of proper body mechanics, compensatory techniques, and ergonomic principles to maximize performance and prevent injury to self and others
  - ▣ Provide pain and self-management strategies.
- ✚ Manage stress and adapt to changing situations.
- ✚ Maintain accurate documentation and communication of information.
- ✚ Apply the principles of infection control, universal precautions and aseptic technique as needed.
- ✚ Understand professional limitations in knowledge, skills and, ability, and seek appropriate assistance when needed.

### Qualifier

Completion of OT degree from AOTA approved program. Current state licensure. Clinical Currency: 112 hours of experience as occupational therapist annually.

### Other Indicators

First Responder, ACLS, Triage, Mass Casualty Training, C-4, Combined Humanitarian Response Training (CHART), DART.

# Audiologist

## Description

Evaluate, plan, and provide Audiology care for acute injuries to hearing components of ears in a disaster or other emergency situations.

## Skills

- ✚ Provide emergency Audiology care in conditions ranging from austere/field to fixed facility. Examples include situations such as a natural or man-made disaster, humanitarian assistance, or in fixed facilities with intact infrastructure
- ✚ Core advanced competency to provide the Audiology standard of care.
- ✚ Perform Audiology examination, consultation and treatment planning for adult and pediatric patient populations
- ✚ Assess and adapt to cultural and language barriers as applicable
- ✚ Coordination and provision of hearing aids and assistive listening devices to hearing impaired population. (Humanitarian missions)
- ✚ Provide hearing conservation services, noise monitoring, and hearing protection to deployed personnel
  
- ✚ Ensure proper and timely patient disposition to other facilities to include proper transfer of records
  
- ✚ Advanced level of understanding of communicable diseases and apply the principles of Universal Precautions to prevent the spread of communicable diseases
- ✚ Manage stress and adapt to changing situations
  
- ✚ Understand professional limitations | knowledge, skills and ability, and seek appropriate assistance when needed.

## Qualifier

Board certification: CCC-A or AAA Fellow, clinical currency: 112 hours/year of experience working in a clinical Audiology environment, continuing professional education as required for licensure, completed 3 years of clinical practice.

## Other Indicators

First Responder, ACLS, Triage, Mass Casualty Training, C-4, US Army Joint Operations Deployment Course (or equivalent) Combined Humanitarian Response Training (CHART), DART



## Clinical Speech and Language Pathologist

### **Description**

Evaluate, plan and intervene, prevent language and speech impairments or disabilities that arise from trauma to the head, stroke and surgery due to medical diagnosis.

### **Skills**

- ✚ Provide emergency support in conditions ranging from the austere to optimum treatment facility.
- ✚ The clinically trained speech and language pathologist has expertise and is trained to evaluate and treat patients with difficulty in swallowing, cognitive, and motor function, memory, verbal and/or written communication.
- ✚ Promotes and provides treatment to insure activities of daily living (ADL)
- ✚ Provides and promotes compensatory methods for communication, like communication board and addressing the individual needs of the patient.
- ✚ Provides “aural rehabilitation” for patients with compromised aural function
  
- ✚ Provides Coma Sensory training for comatosed and brain dysfunctional patient.
- ✚ Provides oral motor strengthening exercises
- ✚ Perform special diagnostic testing: Modified barium study, ultra sound of the soft tissue, modified video fluoroscopic, Palatal prosthetic device.

### **Qualifier**

Completion of a Masters Degree program with a concentration in Speech Pathology and Audiology from an ASHA approved program. Current State Licensure. Board Certification in SLP- CCC. Clinical hours of training of more than 150 hours annually. Completed 3-5 years of direct clinical practice

### **Other Indicators**

Combined Humanitarian Response Training (CHART), DART, Mass Casualty Course, C4 course, BLS certification, ACLS Certification, First Responder  
Medical Equipment training: Ultrasound and Video Fluoroscopic Radiological equipment.  
Glasgow Coma Sensory Neurological scale training

# Mental Health Provider

## Description

Anticipate, identify, assess, and intervene with regard to mental health issues for response personnel. Depending on the event, responsibilities may also include the provision of mental health services to the local population.

## Skills

- ✚ Provide emergency support in conditions ranging from the austere/field to fixed facility. Examples include situation such as a natural or man-made disaster, humanitarian assistance, or fixed facility with an intact infrastructure.
- ✚ Implement mental health services for response personnel in collaboration with local mental health programs.
- ✚ Implement and coordinate mental health services for disaster victims in some settings.
- ✚ Identify appropriate intervention and prevention service, techniques, and counseling.
- ✚ Maintain accurate documentation and communication of information.
- ✚ Manage stress and adapt to changing situations.
- ✚ Understand professional limitations in knowledge, skills and ability, and seek appropriate assistance when needed.

## Qualifier

Certified as a clinical psychologist, psychiatric nurse, clinical social worker, occupational therapist or psychiatrist.  
Clinical Currency: 112 hours of experience of mental health provider or behavioral health provider annually.

## Other Indicators

At least one year of specialized experience in acute mental health disorders, training in Critical Incident Stress Monitoring Training in the Red Cross Model.