

CHAPTER 1

The Professional Chiropractic Therapy Assistant

- **Lesson Purpose**

To give the student a proper introduction to the profession, as well as instruction on the basic qualifications of a chiropractic therapy assistant (CTA) and the responsibilities of licensure.

- **Lesson Objective**

Upon completion the student will:

- Learn the basic qualifications of a CTA
- Learn the duties of a CTA in both clinical and administrative positions
- Understand his/her role in human relations and patient interaction
- Learn the responsibilities of CTA licensure

“The price of greatness is responsibility”

Winston Churchill, 1943

Introduction to the Profession

In today's growing health care field, the demand for qualified professional assistants is on the rise and will continue to increase as demand increases. Chiropractic physicians require knowledgeable assistants with specialized training in order to provide their patients with the highest level of care and treatment available. The chiropractic therapy assistant has to master the specialized areas needed to fill this position in the office, while also possessing the qualities of a career-minded professional.

The chiropractic therapy assistant position requires a person who enjoys challenges, is multi-talented and is willing to do whatever it takes to keep an office running efficiently. She/he not only takes care of patients, but in some private offices, may also have administrative duties. The CTA must be willing to take on all duties and be loyal to the doctor, the practice, and the profession.

Basic Qualifications for the Chiropractic Therapy Assistant

As a chiropractic therapy assistant (CTA), you will play a vital role as a part of the overall practice team. The chiropractic physician leads your team by creating and enforcing policies to make his/her practice efficient and effective. As a staff member, you are responsible to implement these policies in your daily work. As a team, the doctor and staff members all work to accomplish common goals towards the success of the practice as a whole.

To be an effective team member, you must possess the right qualities and qualifications. All chiropractic therapy assistants utilize skills related to human relations, education, customer service, business administration, and of course, healthcare. Much of your experience and abilities will be focused in these aspects of the practice. There are many innate personality traits that assist the chiropractic therapy assistant in effectively performing his/her position. Your commitment to work in a

field that serves others shows that you already possess several of these traits. Other qualifications come with experience. A productive CTA needs the following qualifications to be successful in the chiropractic office:

1. Intellectual prowess and a caring attitude
2. A courteous and gracious demeanor
3. Effective management of time, and in some cases, people
4. Self-motivation
5. Ethics, reliability, and honesty
6. Understanding and compassion
7. Cooperation, and most of all... being a team player!

You may have heard the expression, “Always make a good first impression.” This holds true for the chiropractic therapy assistant. Your personal appearance will speak first and foremost to the patient. The care you take in your hygiene, apparel, and posture will show those who visit your office that you will take equally good care of them.

Always be mindful of your body language and facial expressions, never showing fatigue or symptoms of illness. When speaking, use a clear, confident tone and be sure to make eye contact. Connecting with the patient visually will help you to recognize any signs of nervousness or confusion in their body language, so you can ease their concerns.

The chiropractic therapy assistant will be wise to keep his/her eyes open, listen carefully and never be afraid to ask questions. Be willing to read articles pertaining to chiropractic and enrich your chiropractic vocabulary. By asking questions, reading and listening, you will be able to answer many of the patients’ questions. Do not be embarrassed if you do not know the answer to a question. By asking the doctor you will add to your knowledge base.

Attitude is pivotal in setting the tone for each patient’s experience. Remember that many of the patients are in pain and your personality should be positive and respectful. Let them know that you are interested in their concerns. Be a good listener, as many patients will confide in the CTA certain information that they have not mentioned to the doctor. Be sure to communicate these with your doctor and other staff members as well.

High ethical standards are a must for those working in the chiropractic office. Accuracy in both administrative duties and in patient record documentation is another basic qualification. Your training will give you the knowledge, but you must also combine that with a dedication to quality care and an attention to detail. Learn to be detail oriented in patient accounts, recordkeeping, and patient charts. Information may be needed by an attorney or patient records may be needed by another doctor. If records are neat and legible, the necessary care can be given to and for the patient.

All of these qualifications work to instill trust in your employer that you are fully capable and efficient in your position, so that he/she may concentrate on treating patients and running the chiropractic office.

Common Responsibilities of the Chiropractic Therapy Assistant

As a CTA, you will be called upon to perform numerous tasks in the office, however, the chiropractic physician is responsible for all final decisions. In order for the office to run smoothly, the doctor and the CTA must work together as a team.

Think of yourself as another source of knowledge from which to draw information. The doctor will need you to be able to take care of the tasks he/she assigns and be assured that they will be done correctly.

In some offices, the CTA is responsible for everything from front desk to clinical work. Each practice will have its own policies and procedures, but all essentially require a basic set of tasks that must be done. Below, you will find a list of some administrative duties that may be components of your job description.

Administrative Duties

- Open office and check messages
- Answer phones and schedule appointments
- Take care of patient needs
- Pull charts
- Recordkeeping

- Filing
- Transcribe patient records
- Process patient records requests
- Order supplies
- Process insurance information
- Keep office neat and clean
- Human relations
- Patient educational materials

Clinical Duties

The chiropractic therapy assistant has many clinical duties. Your day will be filled with supporting your doctor and taking on the challenges involved with patient care.

By fully understanding this text, you will be trained and ready to assist the doctor clinically. You will have responsibilities that include assigning patients to rooms, taking vital signs, assisting with examinations, administering electrotherapies, applying ice or moist heat when needed, assisting in rehabilitation techniques, performing manual therapies, and if he/she is qualified per state guidelines, may also take X-rays and develop them.

There will be times when you must schedule your patient for a diagnostic test or an appointment with another provider. Make this easy by keeping a file or electronic address book on the office computer, filled with the contact information of diagnostic companies, pathology labs, hospitals, and medical specialists that you will frequently contact.

Below, you will find a list of common clinical duties in the chiropractic office:

- Patient care
- Physiotherapy: ultrasound, interferential, etc.
- Rehabilitation
- Recording history data and assisting with exams
- Educate the patient in therapies
- Reinforce the doctor's instructions to help patients understand the importance of keeping their appointments
- Maintain therapy equipment

- Schedule patients to see another health professional or for diagnostic tests
- Order clinical supplies
- Keep clinical area clean and sanitized
- Teach home exercises and stretches
- X-ray processing and developing

Human Relations in Healthcare

The care of patients can be quite overwhelming at times. They have many needs, most importantly, the need to trust and have faith in the doctor and his/her staff.

An important role of the CTA is to help build the relationship between the patient and doctor, as well as the staff. The patient needs to see concern, compassion, caring, and honesty in every staff member with whom he/she comes in contact. It is the CTA's responsibility to make the patient comfortable at a time when they are in need.

Responsibilities of Licensure

Chiropractic therapy assistants are required to keep current with changes in the business, insurance and technology areas of the office. CTA's should also strive to be knowledgeable on issues surrounding their profession, including new therapeutic products and services that could be incorporated into the office for the benefit of the patients and the practice.

Chiropractic therapy assistants, licensed by the state, have additional responsibilities to stay informed on updates to laws, rules, and regulations that effect their profession. Licensed CTA's are solely responsible for obtaining the required continuing education hours set forth by their state licensing board, as well as timely renewal of their licenses. Continuing education (CE) is often provided by state associations and other organizations, but most states require approval from the state licensing board. Some states allow portions of CE to be obtained online or through multimedia formats. Again, it is the CTA's responsibility to regularly review the rules and regulations for their license and abide by these rules, in order to avoid fines and/or revocation of his/her license. Specific inquiries should be directed to your state board of chiropractic examiners.

If you are utilizing the knowledge and training offered within this text, your job will be filled with excitement. You will go to work each day looking forward to new and interesting challenges. Your dedication to a professional career as a chiropractic therapy assistant will be very rewarding and fulfilling, both for you and the patients you serve.