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# Physiotherapy;

A profession, not a technique.



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## Overview

Animal physiotherapists are highly skilled members of the veterinary multidisciplinary team (MDT). Understanding how to harness the multidisciplinary approach, as well as the importance of developing close working relationships with veterinarians, are key to enabling potentially life-changing intervention.

## Qualification

Physiotherapy is a degree or postgraduate level, science-based profession that aims to restore movement and function following an injury, illness or disability. The title 'Physiotherapist' is protected under the Royal Charter for Physiotherapists and the Health Care and Professions Council (HCPC) and can only be used by qualified and registered physiotherapists, with only members of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists allowed to use the title 'Chartered Physiotherapist'. However, there is no protection of the title veterinary physiotherapist which can be used by anyone regardless of their level of training. In the UK a 3-year undergraduate degree is required to qualify as a chartered physiotherapist followed by a minimum of 2 years Masters level post-graduate training to become a veterinary physiotherapist and category A member of the Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Animal Therapy (ACPAT). Other degree and postgraduate level veterinary physiotherapy qualifications are also available which ensure a high level of training and professionalism within the field of veterinary physiotherapy. However, there are a wide range of other veterinary physiotherapy courses available with varying standards.

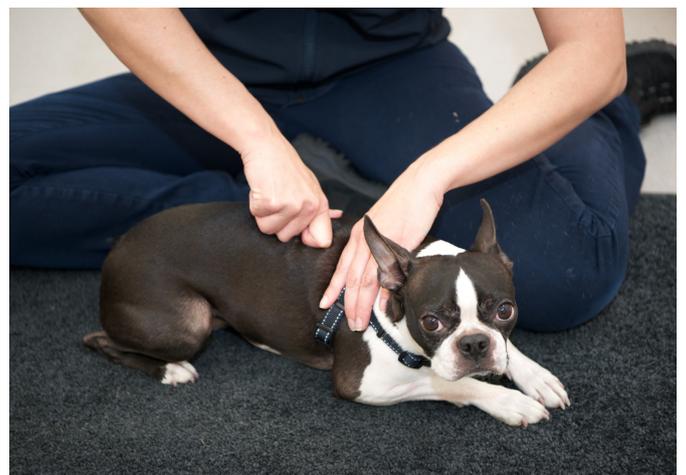


## Regulation

The Veterinary Surgeons Exemptions Order (2015) allows an animal to be treated by a veterinary physiotherapist on referral by a veterinarian providing specific conditions are satisfied. In addition, the BEVA 2016 guidelines 'Working with Allied Professionals' states that maintenance physiotherapy without veterinary direction is appropriate providing the treating therapist is sufficiently trained to recognise when veterinary intervention is required and suitably regulated to protect both the animal and owner. There are numerous governing bodies within the veterinary physiotherapy profession with varying standards required to join these organisations. Veterinary physiotherapists who are registered with ACPAT and/or the 'Register of Animal Musculoskeletal Practitioners' (RAMP) must hold an appropriate undergraduate degree or Masters level qualification. Furthermore, membership of these regulatory bodies requires the member to possess adequate professional and public liability insurance.

## Scope of Practice

The HCPC regulates the physiotherapy profession and to maintain registration physiotherapists must work within their scope of practice. Prior to commencing assessment or treatment, physiotherapists will perform a personal risk assessment that considers their scope of practice in relation to an individual animal and their circumstances. In doing so, the physiotherapist demonstrates an understanding of the scope of the profession of physiotherapy, identifies the limits of their own practice and illustrates an awareness of other professionals expertise. A physiotherapist's recognition of their scope of practice combined with effective communication with the MDT helps to ensure that the animal receives the correct input from the most appropriate professional in an efficient manner. Scope of practice in practical terms encompasses all elements that form a clinical intervention including risk assessment, clinical assessment, treatment goals and plan, together with advice and training for the owner.





## Benefits of physiotherapy

Physiotherapy involves a thorough clinical assessment to identify any musculoskeletal, neurological, cardiorespiratory and/or biomechanical dysfunction that could potentially limit optimal function and performance. Experience in human physiotherapy develops skills which are largely transferable to animal physiotherapy; ACPAT members specialise in diverse areas of physiotherapy allowing highly specialised intervention. Following assessment, a treatment plan is determined consisting of evidence-based interventions including manual therapy, electrotherapy, exercise therapy, education and advice to facilitate optimal rehabilitation.

## Multidisciplinary approach

Within human medicine physiotherapists are an integral part of the multidisciplinary team and a close working relationship usually exists between the medical team and healthcare professionals. This ensures a holistic approach to patient care that aims to optimise patient well-being and outcome. This multidisciplinary approach also offers great benefit to our veterinary patients with collaboration between vets, nurses, physiotherapists and other para-professionals helping to provide a full care package to facilitate maximal health-care benefit to our patients.

Many veterinary physiotherapists have a close working relationship with first opinion and referral veterinarians and many veterinary practices and hospitals offer in-house physiotherapy and rehabilitation facilities.

## Importance of referral

Physiotherapy is not a technique or a specific treatment, it is a profession that requires degree and post-graduate degree level qualifications. It is distinct from medicine or veterinary science and is not a technique to be learnt in a CPD course. Physiotherapists are experts in anatomy, biomechanics and neuromusculoskeletal disorders and are widely involved in research and teaching across the medical and veterinary professions. Chartered physiotherapists are highly respected autonomous practitioners who assess, diagnose and treat. However, veterinary physiotherapists are not permitted to diagnose and require, by law, veterinary consent to treat. By giving consent for the treatment of an animal by a suitably qualified and regulated veterinary physiotherapist, vets allow their patients to receive potentially life-changing intervention by a highly skilled clinician.

