

NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

It's an exciting time for the animal physical therapy community! This fall, in the ramp up to CSM 2026, we will be hosting a series of monthly webinars on the APTA Orthopedics YouTube channel starting with *What is Animal Physical Therapy?* The goal of these webinars is to gather as a community to share who we are, what we do, and how other physical therapists can join us! Our next webinar is *How to Become an Animal PT* on October 16. In addition, new animal physical therapy educational content will be added to our YouTube channel, like Lisa Bedenbaugh's *Comparative Anatomy in the Human and Canine*. Do you have a topic wish list? Are you interested in being a content provider? Please reach out! We are happy to have you join in the fun!

See you online soon!
Sasha Foster



THE BRIDGE FROM HUMAN PHYSICAL THERAPY TO ANIMAL PHYSICAL THERAPY

By Caroline (Carrie) Adrian, PT, PhD, tCPT
(Transitional Canine Physical Therapist)
Owner/Founder of CanineIQ

Have you ever wondered if your physical therapy skills could translate to treating animals—but weren't sure where to begin? The good news is, as a licensed physical therapist, you've already taken the first step. Your training in human musculoskeletal and neurological physical therapy provides a strong foundation for working with animal patients.

Interprofessional Collaboration

Canine physical therapy gained momentum in the United States in the late 1990s, when physical therapists recognized the value of applying human physical therapy expertise to animal care—particularly for dogs and horses. From the outset, it was evident that integration into veterinary practice requires more than clinical expertise—it requires meaningful **interprofessional collaboration** with veterinarians, veterinary technicians, and other animal health professionals in a field that has traditionally worked within its own professional boundaries. As physical therapists, we often find ourselves introducing our veterinary colleagues to what true cross-disciplinary collaboration can look like.

In 2018, the APTA adopted the position statement *Collaborative Relationships Between Physical Therapists and Veterinarians* (HOD P06-18-25-32), affirming its support for collaboration between the two professions and recognizing the advancement of specialized practice by physical therapists providing physical therapy for animals. (www.apta.org/siteassets/pdfs/policies/collaborative-relationships-between-physical-therapist-and-veterinarians.pdf)

Today, many physical therapists and veterinarians work side by side to help animal patients with functional limitations achieve optimal outcomes. While the veterinary model shares similarities with human health care, it is not identical. For physical therapists' movement and biomechanical expertise to be recognized and valued in animal care, we must invest time in understanding the clinical skills, business models, and workflows of the veterinary team.

Educational programs that prioritize interprofessional collaboration and shared decision-making help prepare physical therapists to work respectfully and effectively within this niche environment.

Certification vs. Credential: Understanding the Difference

A **certification** is typically granted by a third-party organization and verifies that certain standards have been met through an examination. A **credential** is recognition of completing a specific program or course of study, demonstrating the knowledge and skills gained.

Most animal rehabilitation programs offer a **certification**—acknowledging course completion but not granting a formal credential to practice. For physical therapists, the ability to work with animals is determined by state physical therapy licensing boards.

Currently, **CanineIQ's Transitional Canine Physical Therapist (tCPT™)** program is the only US **credential** in animal physical therapy designed **exclusively for physical therapists**. This credential recognizes advanced expertise in canine physical therapy, combining physical therapy-focused biomechanics and movement science with essential veterinary content, such as cardiology, internal medicine, zoonoses, oncology, and behavior/handling, taught by boarded veterinary specialists. The tCPT™ is designed for licensed physical therapists and DPT students (after one year in a CAPTE-accredited program), honoring our professional education, scope of practice, and standards. The program is grounded in the published 2019 APTA Animal Physical Therapist Clinical Practice Standards.

WHY PHYSICAL THERAPISTS NEED ADDITIONAL EDUCATION FOR ANIMAL PRACTICE

A CAPTE-accredited physical therapy education covers biomechanics, neuroanatomy, and evidence-based treatment—but typically does not include:

- Veterinary anatomy and biomechanics
- Species-specific handling and restraint
- Zoonoses and infection control
- Emergency protocols for animals
- Legal and ethical considerations for animal care

Recognizing this, the **2019 APTA Animal Physical Therapy Special Interest Group (APTSIG) Clinical Practice Standards** (https://www.orthopt.org/uploads/content_files/files/Clinical_Practice_Standards_Animal_PT_ARSIG_Board_Approved_April_2019.pdf) identified the essential competencies for physical therapists working with animals. This landmark document clarified the scope of practice, outlined educational gaps, and serves as the foundation upon which programs like CanineIQ's tCPT™ have been developed.

THE EVOLVING REGULATORY LANDSCAPE

State laws vary. Some states allow physical therapists to treat animals under veterinary referral or supervision, while others prohibit it. Although the APTA recognizes animal physical therapy as within physical therapists' scope, state laws prevail.

In 2024, the **Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (FSBPT)** formed a task force to draft regulatory language to support the Model Practice Act (MPA) for animal physical therapy. The goal is to:

- Establish consistent national standards
- Support legal recognition for physical therapists treating animals in all 50 states
- Foster mutual recognition by the physical therapy and veterinary professions

These standards are expected to be released in late summer or early fall of 2025.

LOOKING AHEAD

Canine physical therapy is a growing specialty built on science, collaboration, and advocacy. Programs—such as CanineIQ's tCPT™—that directly map to the APTSIG's competencies are paving the way for physical therapists to enter animal care with confidence, respect, and professional identity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Caroline (Carrie) Adrian, PT, has 25 years of experience as a canine physical therapist. She is the owner and founder of CanineIQ.net, created to share her passion for the profession and open new, meaningful opportunities for physical therapists to improve the lives of animals.



U.S. Canine Physical Therapy Credential and Rehabilitation Certification Programs

(Information current at the time of writing; please refer to each program's website for updates.)

tCPT™ – Transitional Canine Physical Therapist Credential

Offered by CanineIQ
www.canineiq.net

CCRP – Certified Canine Rehabilitation Practitioner Certification

Offered by University of Tennessee/VAHL
www.utvetrehab.com/canine-rehab-ccrp

CCRT – Certified Canine Rehabilitation Therapist Certification

Offered by Canine Rehabilitation Institute (CRI)
www.caninerehabinstitute.com

CCAT – Companion Animal Rehabilitation Therapist Certification

Offered by NC State/Northeast Seminars
www.ncsuvetce.com/canine-rehab-ccat

Upcoming Opportunities to Join the Animal Physical Therapy Community!

Monthly webinars (look for the email from APTA Orthopedics with the dates/times)

Combined Sections Meeting February 12-14, 2026, Anaheim, California <https://csm.apta.org/>

- APT-SIG in-person meeting, Friday, February 13
- APTA SIG sponsored educational content, date TBA