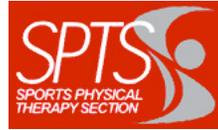


“Comparing Sport Physiotherapy in Canada & the United States”

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Being in the unique position of having worked as a sport physiotherapist both in Canada and the United States, I thought it would be interesting to our membership to compare and contrast the Sports Physical Therapy Section (SPTS) and Sport Physiotherapy Canada (SPC). While our two healthcare systems are vastly different (although the gap is slowly closing in on both sides), there are many similarities shared. Once all is said and done, we both subscribe to similar values, philosophies, and a desire to help our athletic patients perform at their best. This article seeks to shed light on those similarities, as well as what makes them different when looking at governance/organization, membership statistics, education systems, certifications, and how we both work towards what generally is considered to be the highest honour; becoming a member of an Olympic Medical Team.

Both SPTS and SPC are sections/component members of their parent organizations; the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) and the Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA), respectively. The organizations both have a national executive that oversee and guide their members through dissemination of information on current physical therapy trends and practices to improve the care of physically active individuals. Both SPTS and SPC have established relationships with many of the collateral/partner organizations (sports medicine physicians, athletic therapists, Centres for Ethics & Sport, World Anti-Doping Agency, Olympic Committees, etc.) associated with providing treatment for the athletic population and the governance & promotion of competition. Additionally, both sections work to promote the development of sports physical therapy educational programs. This is accomplished in part by sponsoring continuing education courses, sport PT publications (*Momentum*, *Journal of Orthopedic and Sports Physical Therapy [JOSPT]*, *The North American Journal of Sports Physical Therapy [NAJSPT]*), and providing opportunities for its members to become involved in research related to the subspecialty and the practice (i.e. field care) of sport physical therapy. SPTS & SPC members are also active in promoting sports PT in educational institutions, as well as try to increase the general awareness of the role of sport physiotherapists.

When comparing the SPTS and SPC, it is easier to compare & contrast the two organizations when looking at some key facts side-by-side (*see Table 1.0. Comparative Data: Sports Physical Therapy Section & Sport Physiotherapy Canada*). When looking at the two organizations, it is surprising to see that our ‘big brother’ south of the border, while larger in size and more extensive (*see Fig. 1. Sport Physical Therapy Section (SPTS) Leadership Components*), actually began not soon after us in Canada. While one can only speculate as to the events leading up to the formation of each of the two sections, we should recognize that our athletic therapy counterparts formed around 1950 (National Athletic Trainers’ Association - NATA) and 1965 (Canadian Athletic Therapists Association - CATA), well before both our starts in the early 1970s. Many ‘sport physical therapists’ back in the day, were also certified as athletic therapists (ATC & CAT(c)). However, with the advent of accredited post-secondary institution requirements and education inflation, the professionalization of athletic therapy is here, and physical therapists must now find another way to differentiate and demonstrate themselves to be highly skilled healthcare practitioners when it comes to dealing with athletes.

When looking at the executives, like many of the more involved sport PTs in Canada, there seems to be a high level of affiliation with University / Colleges. This seems to be more so in the United States, as the SPTS seems to be more knowledge- and research-based. By no means am I implying that SPC is not research-based, just that SPC seems to have traditionally placed greater emphasis on practical or ‘on-field’ skills than its American counterpart. This is quite possibly due to the fact that up until recently, the major path through which physical therapists in the United States would normally gain ‘on-field’
...(continued)

Table 1.0. Comparative Data: Sports Physical Therapy Section & Sport Physiotherapy Canada

	 <p>SPC</p>	 <p>SPTS</p>
Founded	1972	1973
Governance	Section of CPA (<i>one of thirteen</i>) Governed by National Executive Committee. Most positions on executives are held for 2 year terms.	Section of APTA (<i>one of nineteen, 3rd largest</i>) Governed by Executive Committee, whose positions are up for re-election every 3 years.
Subdivisions	Subsidiary provincial executives, with corresponding provincial executive positions (Chair, secretary, treasurer, newsletter editor, events coordinator, etc.)	Does not have formal state executives, but does have State Representative Network. SPTS does, however have about eight special interest groups (SIGs), along with a many teams/committees. [<i>please see Figure 1.</i>]
Mission Statements	“To provide leadership and direction to members of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association for the advancement of sport physical therapy by fostering excellence in practice, education and research for the benefit of active Canadians.”	“The mission of the SPTS, as a component of the APTA, is to promote the identity of the Sports Physical Therapist and to serve its members, athletes of all ages and abilities, the profession, and the community at large through excellence in Sports PT practice, research, education and professional development.”
Education System	A formal, structured certification system administered by SPC which consists of 3 levels: I – Certificate Candidate (first aid & CPR) II – Certificate in Sport Physiotherapy III – Diploma in Sport Physiotherapy	SCS (Sports Certified Specialist), administered by the <i>American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties [ABPTS]</i> . SPTS itself does not administer the exam, but they do offer some prep courses. Other sports PT certifications are also offered by various groups (<i>i.e. the 'STC' certification thru North American Sports Medicine Institute & the University of St. Augustine</i>)
Sport PT Fellowships*	There seems to be only one Sport PT fellowship; at the Fowler Kennedy Clinic, University of Western Ontario, started in 1995. UBC had one, but was discontinued ~1998, while a few other universities are considering.	There are currently 9 fellowship/residency programs accredited by SPTS, ranging from 9 to 24 months in length (typically 12 months). http://www.spts.org/specialties/1/109.html
Certification Exam started	1982	~1985 (SCS)
Relative Membership Statistics	Total CPA members: ~ 9,650 Total Ortho Division (OD) members: ~ 3989 SPC members: 1337 members (<i>as of Sept'06</i>) SPC members who also belong to OD~ 1122 95 active SPC Certificate Holders 105 active SPC Diploma holders 264 Certification Candidates	Total APTA Members: 68,114 (<i>as of Jan.1'07</i>) Orthopaedic Section members: 14,257 Sports PT Section: 5,144 SPTS PTs who also belong to Ortho: 2,529 As of 2006, there are 6,745 individuals who have been certified as clinical specialists: 3906 Orthopaedic (OCS) & 569 Sports (SCS)
Publications	Momentum (went online-only as of 2006) and The North American Journal of Sports Physical Therapy (NAJSPT).	The Journal of Orthopedic and Sports Physical Therapy (JOSPT, in conjunction with the Orthopedic Section), and The North American Journal of Sports Physical Therapy.
Major Games selection	Application through SPC national, and must have SPC Diploma to be considered. Applicants ranked based on set criteria point system, special games circumstances/needs, then final decisions made by Franchise Holders along with Chief Therapist, Chief Medical Officer, and Chef de Mission.	SPTS is not officially involved in the selection process. Application for core medical teams made through US Olympic Committee (USOC), and PTs would apply via their ATC certification. It is only recently that application as a physical therapist will be made available. Must be a US citizen.

* Both fellowship programs assist in Sport PT certification, but are not mandatory, and do not guarantee success.

Figure 1. Sport Physical Therapy Section (SPTS) Leadership Components

Executive Committee	Teams / Committees	*Special Interest Groups (SIGs)
President President-elect Vice President Secretary Treasurer Members-at-large	National Assembly Board Liaison Administrative Services Team Professional Development Team <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Team leader</i> • <i>Team Concept Conference Coordinator</i> • <i>Publications Chair</i> • <i>Educational Affairs Liaison</i> • <i>Managing Editor-Publications</i> Educational Programming Team <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Educational Programming Team Leader</i> • <i>Combined Sections Meeting Program Chair</i> • <i>Research Team Coordinator</i> Special Interest Groups (SIGs)* Governance Services Team <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Governance Services Team Leader</i> • <i>Government Affairs Coordinator</i> • <i>Bylaws Team Coordinator</i> • <i>State Rep Network Team Coordinator</i> Membership Services Team Awards Team Information Technology Team Leader Website Content Team Coordinator Public Relations Team Coordinator Sports Specialty Council Members	Athletes with Disability SIG Emergency Response SIG Female Athlete SIG Golf and Golf Performance SIG Knee SIG Pediatric Sports Fitness SIG Professional/Collegiate Therapist SIG Shoulder SIG

(continued)... credibility was by getting their ATC designation. By becoming certified athletic trainers as well, American physical therapists could thus prove themselves as worthy of working on professional & collegiate athletes, and as members of the US Olympic Medical Team. The former ‘*apprenticeship route*’ to the athletic trainer certification, which did not require any formal post-secondary education in athletic training, but only passing a written and practical exam, after having logged enough field care hours, was recently eliminated. Physical therapists are now required to seek a different way of showing specific competency in sport PT (unless, a therapist had received their undergraduate degree *in* athletic training, prior to completing their post-graduate physical therapy degrees - as of 2002, the US only accredited PT programs that were at the MSc or DPT level). The NATA eliminated the apprenticeship route to becoming a certified athletic trainer (ATC) in 2004, whereas the CATA eliminated their comparable certification route back in the late-1990s. It is likely that more and more US & Canadian physical therapists will apply to become *Sports Certified Specialists (SCS)* or get their *Diploma in Sport Physiotherapy*, now that it would take an additional post-secondary degree to get certified as an athletic trainer (ATC or CAT(c)).

Many sport physical therapists in the US also have their CSCS designation (*Certified Strength & Conditioning Specialist*, through the *National Strength & Conditioning Association - NSCA*) along with their ATC. The NSCA (founded in 1978) reports that they have now certified more than 20,000 CSCSs, since the exam was first administered in 1985. It is interesting that here is yet another credential which exists for US PTs, this one to show competency in exercise physiology, prescription, and program design. In comparison, Sport Physiotherapy Canada assesses these competencies in one of four stations on the SPC Diploma oral/practical examination, as well as on the written exam.

The Certificate & Diploma levels of the SPC education system have long been regarded as extremely challenging, mainly due to the oral/practical component of the examinations. In contrast, not only does the SPTS not administer their specialization exam, the ABPTS’ certification in sports (SCS) requires only a written/computer competency exam, to be taken after a candidate has met these criteria:

- CPR & Emergency Care certification (*slightly more advanced than required for Certificate Candidates*)
- 2,000 hours of direct patient care in the specialty area (sports PT), of which...
 - 500 hours must have occurred within the last three years, or...

- includes successful completion of an APTA credentialed post-professional clinical residency in sport physical therapy.*

Interestingly enough, you don't have to be a member of the APTA to apply for and become a Sports Certified Specialist, though the costs for non-APTA applicants are quite prohibitive (or, rather encouraging – to join the APTA). For example, the application and exam costs of the SCS (2007) are \$500 and \$800 respectively for APTA members, whereas for non-members those fees increase to \$845 and \$1525. By comparison, you must be a member of both CPA & SPC to get your Diploma in Sport Physiotherapy.

In Canada, the title 'sport physical therapist,' or 'sport physiotherapist' has been reserved to designate those therapists who have obtained their Diploma in Sport Physiotherapy, and thus completed the entire SPC education system. In the United States, to my knowledge, the term is not protected.

The governance structure of Sport Physiotherapy Canada, as well as the SPC Selection Grid are both very well explained in the Spring 2005 issue of Momentum (Vol.28, No.3), so I will not belabour those details. Given that the SPTS membership base is almost 4 times the size of SPC, it is not surprising that they have such extensive subdivisions (*see Fig. 1. Sport Physical Therapy Section (SPTS) Leadership Components*). However, as a percentage of its parent association's membership, SPC almost doubles SPTS (14% & 7.5% respectively). Also from looking at the membership statistics, we can see that ~84% of SPC members also belong to the Orthopaedic Division, whereas 49% of SPTS members are also members of the APTA's Orthopaedic Section.

One of the most significant differences between Sport Physiotherapy Canada and the Sport Physical Therapy Section is in their involvement in the of selection of physiotherapists for Major Games such as the World University (FISU) Games, Pan American Games, and the Olympic Games. While SPC is responsible for everything from operating the obligatory education system (having your SPC Diploma is one of the minimum requirements for Major Games application), selection of our top physiotherapists to represent our country, to negotiations with Franchise & Stakeholders, the SPTS has, so far, little involvement with this entire process. Even the SCS certification is not a requirement for Games application. Now, enter the *United States Olympic Committee* (USOC). The USOC is a federally chartered non-profit corporation accountable to the American people and Congress, whose mission is "To support United States Olympic and Paralympic athletes in achieving sustained competitive excellence and preserve the Olympic ideals, and thereby inspire all Americans." It can be compared to the *Canadian Olympic Committee* (COC). The USOC is also the organization responsible for the selection of healthcare providers to serve as members of the US Olympic Medical Team, through its Sports Medicine Volunteer Program.

"Volunteer physicians, chiropractors and certified athletic trainers complement the USOC's core medical staff to provide the services necessary to attend to the athletes from any of the 42 Olympic and Pan American Sports registered at Colorado Springs, Lake Placid, Chula Vista Olympic Training Centers and Marquette Olympic Education Center. The USOC Volunteer Program also serves as the first step in the evaluation process for selection to USOC competitive events World University Games, Pan American Games, Paralympic Games, and Olympic Games." (from page 9 of USOC's Sports Medicine Program Handbook).

Figure. 2. Establishment of Olympic Training Sites:

Colorado Springs (Colorado)	- 1979 (<i>Program Inception</i>)
Marquette (Michigan)	- 1985
Lake Placid (New York)	- 1983
Chula Vista (California, close to San Diego)	- 1996

All applicants must be United States citizens, and will undergo a credential review and criminal background check. They must also have provided on-site care for teams over the last two years, attending both practices and competitions, and have at least 5 years of ongoing sports medicine practice, post certification or licensure. A letter of reference must be submitted from the athletic director, head coach or National Governing Body (NGB) administrator documenting the healthcare provider's involvement in coverage of the team(s).

Once a volunteer's application has been accepted, they will be invited to one of four Olympic Training Centers listed above (Fig.2.), thus entering the first step of the Sport Medicine Volunteer Program.

"The program steps are as follows:

(No Volunteer Can Bypass Any Steps and There Is No Guarantee On Progression To the Next Level).

Level 1 Two weeks (14 consecutive days or as otherwise noted in the NGB priority information) at one of the Olympic Training Centers (room and board provided by the USOC).

Level 2 National/International appointment, by USOC invitation. (Examples: National NGB Championships, World Youth Games, and other National USOC endorsed Games and/or International USOC endorsed Games. This requires 3 or more weeks of service with transportation and room/board provided by the USOC).

Level 3 International Games Appointment by USOC invitation. (Examples: Pan American Games, World University Summer or Winter Games, International NGB Championships, IF and other International USOC endorsed Games. This requires 3 or more weeks of service with transportation and room provided by the USOC).

Level 4 Olympic Games/Paralympic Games (Summer and Winter). (This requires 8 or more weeks of service with transportation and room provided by the USOC).

At each level, medical, administrative, athletes and NGB staffs evaluate the volunteers regarding medical skills, rapport with athletes/coaches, and adherence to policies of the USOC and its Sports Medicine Committee, and interaction with sport and administration officials. This helps assure selection of a qualified and compatible medical team." (from USOC-Sports Medicine division, Certified Athletic Trainer Application).

As previously mentioned, up until recently, US physical therapists had to apply via their ATC credentials, as the USOC is only now finalizing a formal sport physical therapist application. The PT application requirements are supposed to be exactly the same as for other practitioners. The only notable variance in the applications requirements is that they require massage therapists to have a minimum of 750 hours of education. A couple of particularly interesting questions that are asked on all applications are "**DO YOU SKI?**" and at "*What level?*"

Not having your ATC certification currently limits your opportunities to work with higher level teams in the US. For example, most professional sports teams, USA Track & Field, and USA Rugby all have ATC requirements for their therapists, likely due to traditional liability issues. In terms of additional language skills, having them does not seem like as much as a consideration for the USOC, as does the ability to speak French for Canadian Medical teams. Although, as with being a Doping Control Officer, one does not officially get 'selection grid points' for their SPC rankings; it is a consideration that is taken into account given the particular needs of the medical team at a particular Games.

All-in-all, like in Canada, involvement in sport physical therapy in the US usually involves many tireless volunteer hours and low monetary compensation, and a very long road to becoming part of the "Core Medical Team."

For more information, please refer to the following websites:

Sport Physiotherapy Canada (SPC):

www.sportphysio.ca

Sports Physical Therapy Section (SPTS):

www.spts.org

Canadian Athletic Therapists Association (CATA):

www.athletictherapy.org

National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA):

www.nata.org

National Strength & Conditioning Association (NSCA):

www.nsca-lift.org

Canadian Olympic Committee (COC):

www.olympic.ca

United States Olympic Committee (USOC):

www.usoc.org

USOC Sports Medicine Program:

www.usolympicteam.com/sportsmed

ABPT Sports Certified Specialist (SCS):

go to www.apta.org, then click 'professional resources' under 'Areas of Interest' on left.

If you have any questions regarding this article, please contact Ed at edison@dcsportsmedicine.com.

Author Bio: Edison is a sport physiotherapist who graduated from the University of Toronto's Physical Therapy program (BScPT) following a BSc degree from Queen's University. After having worked five years at the University of Toronto Sports Medicine Clinic, he moved to the Washington, DC area, where he now works with the doctors of the Washington Wizards (NBA), Capitals (NHL), and Nationals (MLB). He has been a member of Sport Physiotherapy Canada since 1996, and was a member of the SPC-Ontario executive, including serving as the Chair. Ed has also been a member of the Sport Physical Therapy Section (SPTS) for the past year, and got a chance to speak with both SPTS & SPC executives at the Team Concept Conference in Las Vegas, Dec. 1-3, 2006.