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Purpose/Hypothesis: Although a formal clinical practice survey of acute care physical therapy has been undertaken, little is known about the specific skills performed by acute care physical therapists working in the intensive care unit (ICU). The purpose of this study was to describe physical therapy (PT) practice in the ICU.

Number of Subjects: 340 physical therapists with acute care experience from 24 clinical sites affiliated with one DPT program.

Materials/Methods: Center Coordinators of Clinical Education (CCCEs) at 29 clinical sites who offered acute care placements to one DPT academic program were sent an email invitation to participate in a survey of PT practice in critical care. Twenty-four CCCEs agreed to participate and were asked to distribute paper copies of the survey to staff with acute care experience. A total of 340 surveys were mailed to the clinical sites. In the survey, participants were asked to provide their educational and clinical background and they were asked to describe the frequency with which they performed critical care skills and their perception of the importance of these skills using Likert scales. The investigators performed descriptive analyses for educational and clinical background and rank-ordered skills by the percentage indicating that the skill was performed daily and by the percentage indicating that the skill was important or very important.

Results: Nineteen clinical sites returned a total of 186 surveys for a response rate of 54.7%. Only one of the sites was located outside of the northeast U.S.. Respondents had a mean of 9.8±8.6 years of experience overall, 6.8±6.0 years of acute care experience, and 4.6±5.0 years of critical care experience. 9.5% were clinical specialists, and 62% completed a DPT. The skills performed daily by more than 90% of participants included 4 of 17 assessment skills, 2 of 13 intervention-related skills, 1 of 14 skills related to determining appropriateness of referral and implications for management, and 5 of 6 communication skills. All of these skills were perceived as important by >97% of participants. The skills performed daily by less than 25% of participants included 4 of 17 assessment skills, 6 of 13 intervention-related skills, 1 of 14 skills related to determining appropriateness of referral and implications for management, and none of the communication skills included in the survey. The percentage of physical therapists who perceived these skills as
important or very important ranged from 36.6 to 84.4%.

**Conclusions:** Skills that were performed daily by over 90% of participants were strongly perceived as important. Other skills which were performed daily by less than 25% of respondents were nonetheless perceived as important by many clinicians.

**Clinical Relevance:** As the availability of evidence supporting the role of the PT in the care of critically ill patients’ increases, a description of practice in this environment will be valuable in the training of students and clinicians.