

The 2019 New Grad Physical Therapist Report

A survey of 795 physical therapists that graduated between 2012 and 2017



Introduction

Every year, CovalentCareers runs a survey of physical therapists. We're looking for the kind of demographic data we can't get from social media or the experiences of staff writers. When we run these surveys, we also realize that they won't give us the full picture. That's why we combine that with research from sources like the Pew Research Center, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the APTA, and many others—to contextualize what we find.

We do this because our primary goal is and always will be to provide job placements and mentorship to healthcare practitioners, particularly physical therapists, and we can't do that without understanding the industry-wide changes that are shaking up the job outlook for PTs across the US.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports a substantially higher job growth in physical therapy than the national average, and the APTA has projected a corresponding shortage of PTs in the workforce. As the US population ages—according to the US Census Bureau projections, by 2030, 21% of the US population will be over 65—more therapists will be needed to assist a growing population determined to age in place.

This is what the 2019 Physical Therapy Report is meant to do: provide a snapshot of this particular moment in time, based on the responses to our 2018 survey from more than 800 physical therapists and physical therapy students who have graduated since 2012. We asked our readers questions ranging from their starting salary to their feelings about the profession and received all kinds of responses, which you'll find in these pages.

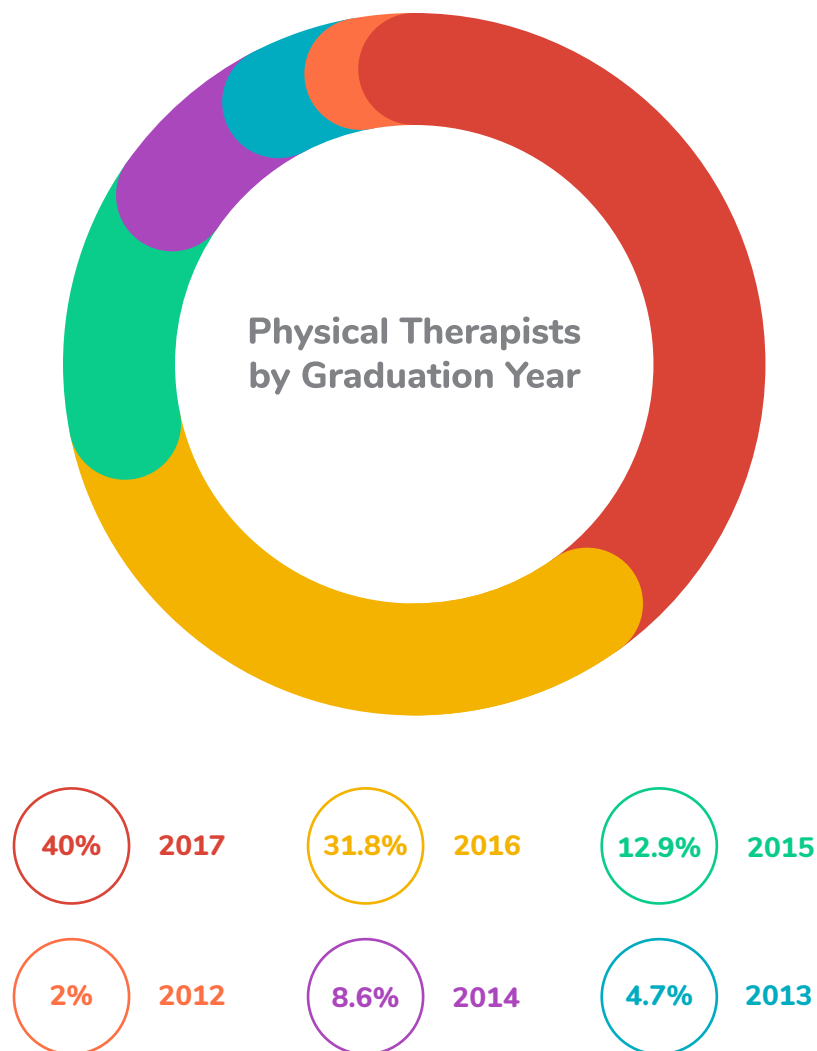
What will the profession look like in five years? In ten? We don't know—but we do know that physical therapists are more than capable of meeting whatever the future throws at them.

The 2018 New Grad PT Survey

In 2018, we surveyed 795 physical therapists, 17 physical therapist assistants, 30 physical therapy students, 15 practice owners, and 11 industry professionals who graduated between 2012 and 2021.

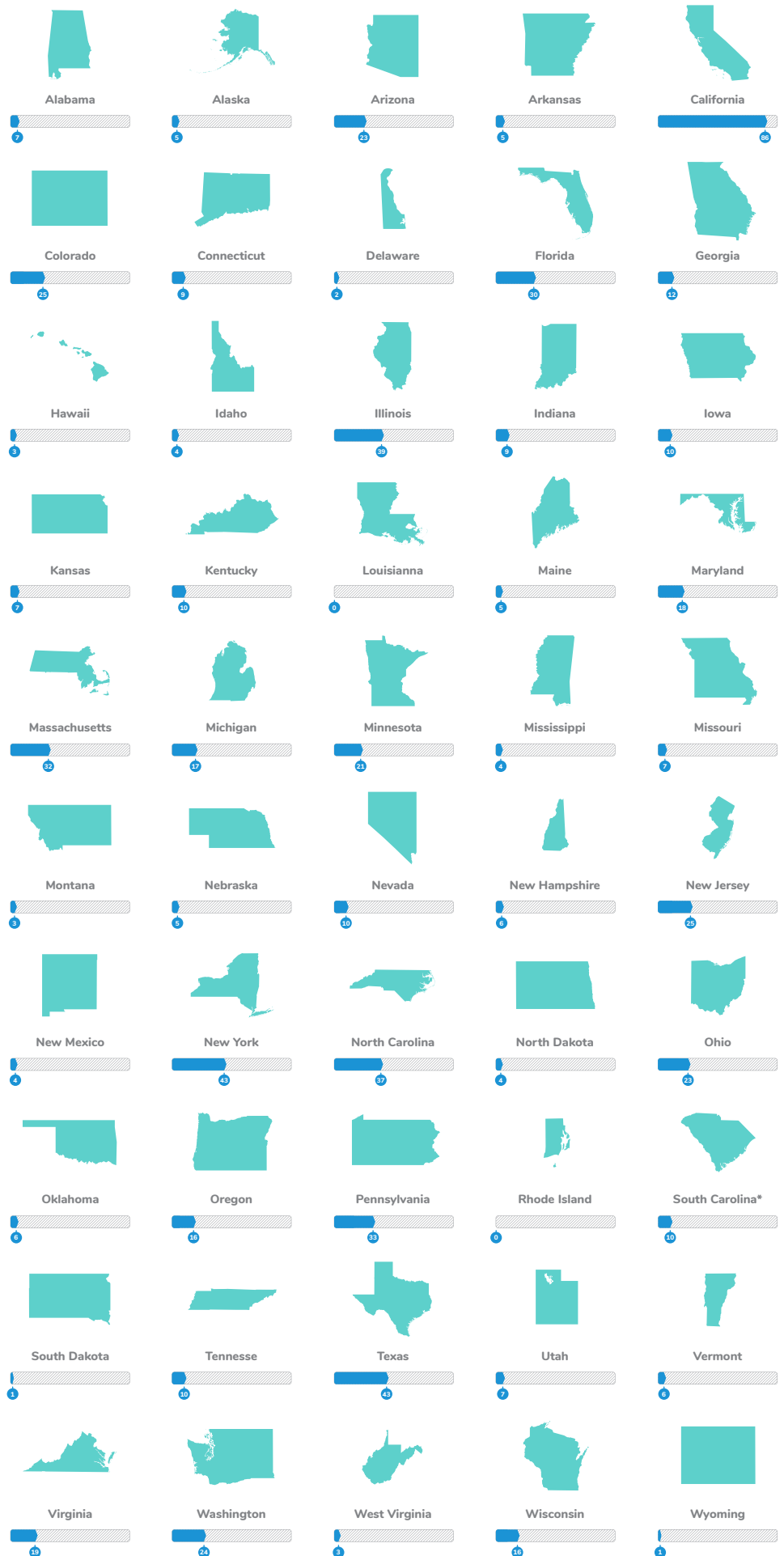
Visualization of respondents by graduation year

The majority of our respondents were PTs who graduated in 2016 and 2017—and considering that we strive to provide leading career development resources to new grad physical therapists, this was great news to us.



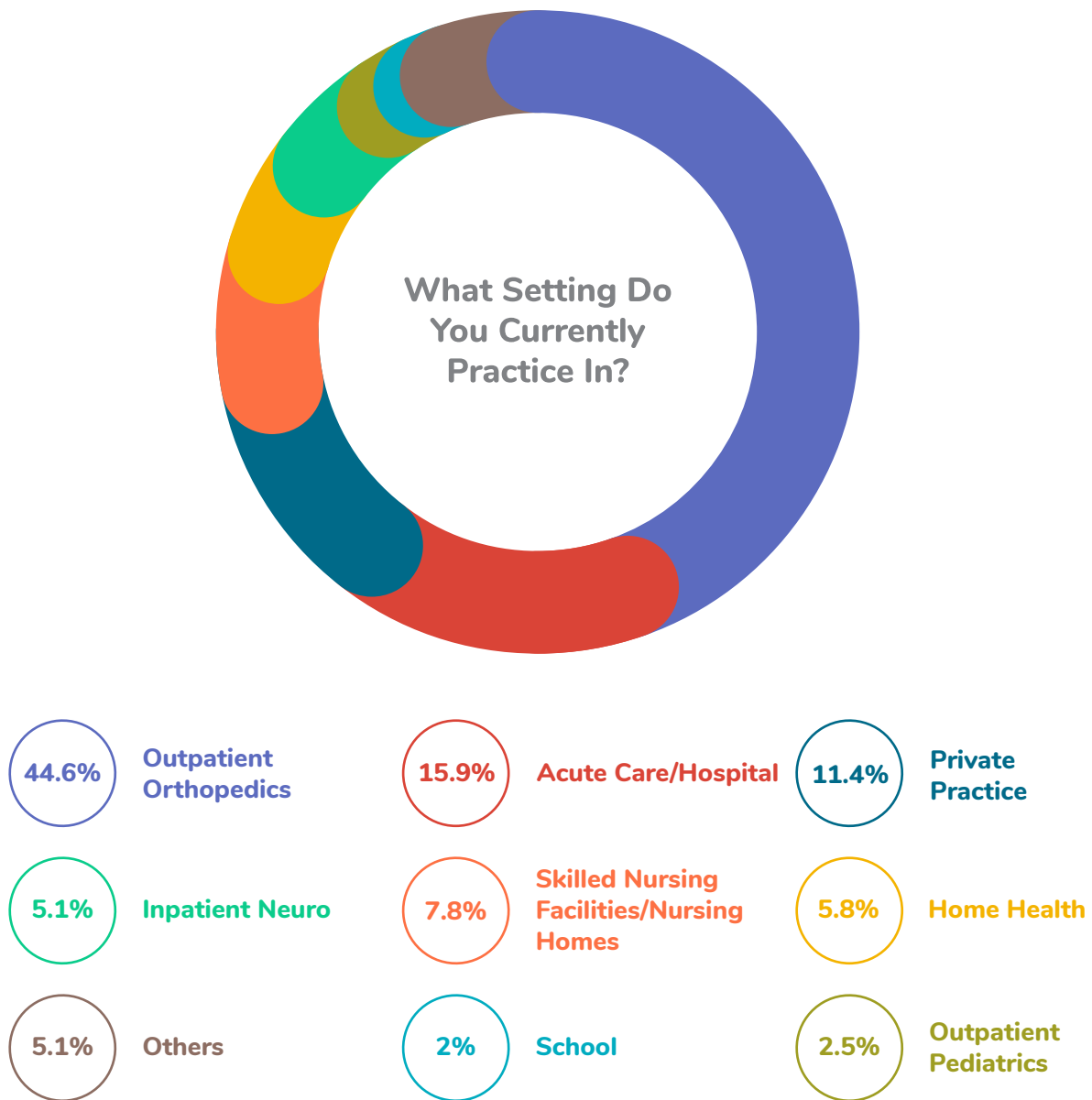
What state do you currently work in?

We asked PTs what state they worked in to compare our readership to existing records of where physical therapists work. As expected, the vast majority of our respondents work in California—we understand, since we love it here too!



What setting do you currently practice in?

Of course, we always expect to see outpatient orthopedics make up the largest portion of PT settings. Based on the projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the APTA predicting dramatic growth in the number of individuals requiring geriatric care, we expect the percentage of PTs working in home health to increase noticeably over the next several years.



New Grad PTs On Their Job Search

We always ask new PTs about their experience on the job search, because one of our main goals is to make the hiring experience smoother and less painful for both employer and candidate.

How difficult was it finding your **FIRST** physical therapy job?

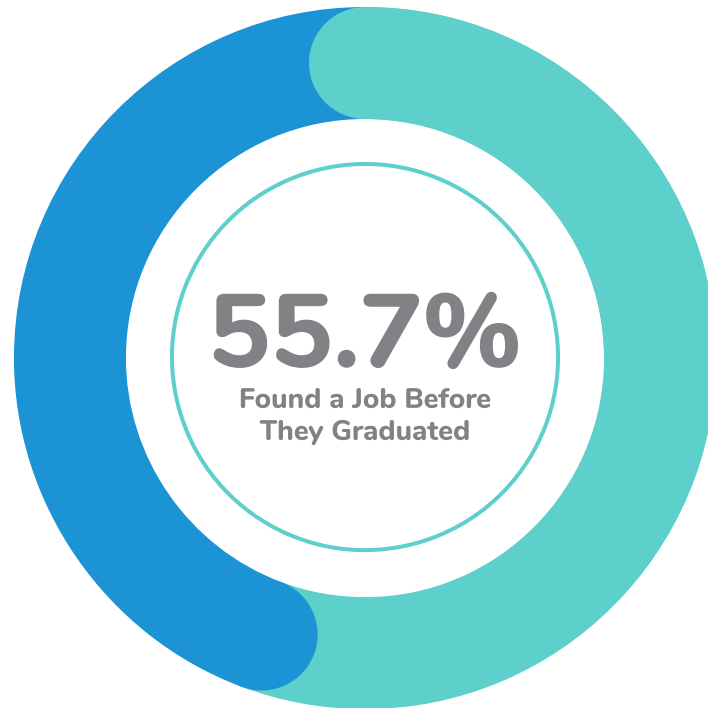
The great news for students and new grads is that finding that first physical therapy job is easy—respondents rated their average difficulty at 3.18 out of 10. For employers, this means it's absolutely crucial to make sure PTs can find your job posting.



New graduate Physical Therapists rate their average difficulty to find a job at 3.18/10

Did you secure your job before you graduated physical therapy school?

More than half of the physical therapists we surveyed found their first job before they graduated PT school. This is fantastic news for PT students; for employers, it means you've got to start your hiring process early.



From the time you graduated with your diploma, how many weeks did it take to accept your FIRST physical therapy job?

Of the 44.3% of physical therapists who didn't find their job before graduating, it took them an average of 9.24 weeks to accept their first physical therapy job. That's similar to the range of averages for how long it takes most Americans to find jobs—between 53 days and 71 days, depending on the industry and position.

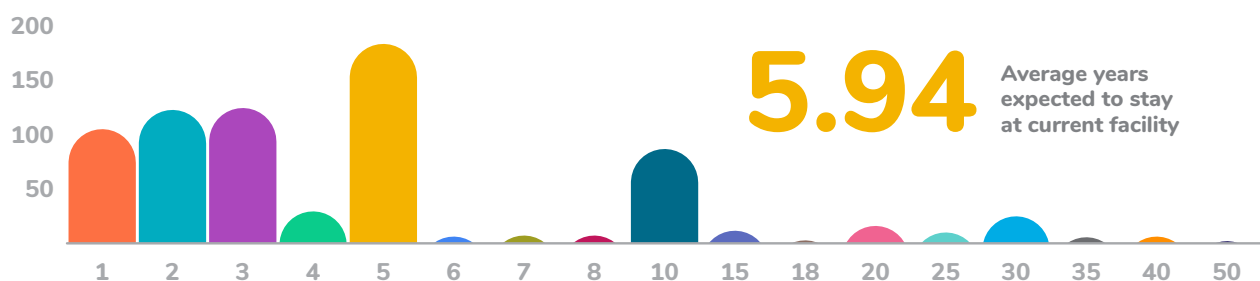
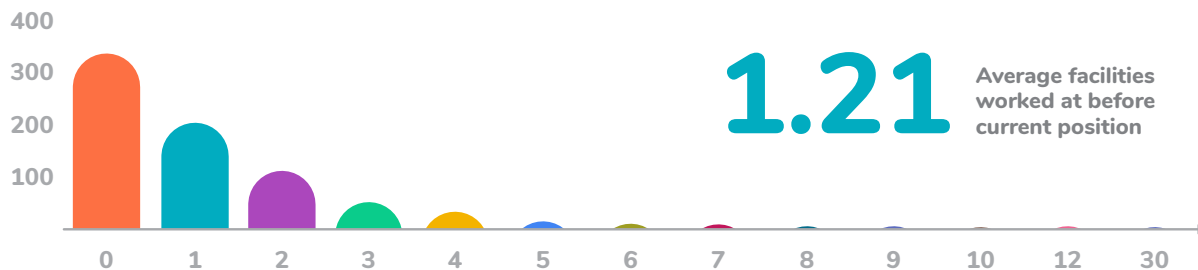


New Grad PTs In The Workplace

Once PTs accept that first job, how long do they plan to stay? How hard do they work? What do they want out of a first job? These are the questions we wanted answers to.

How many facilities have you worked for before your current position?

New graduates intend to stay put: New graduate PTs expected to stay at their current position for 5.94 years prior to switching jobs again. Additionally, on average, these PTs have only worked at 1.21 facilities prior to their current job.



Today, on average, how many patients per day do you see?

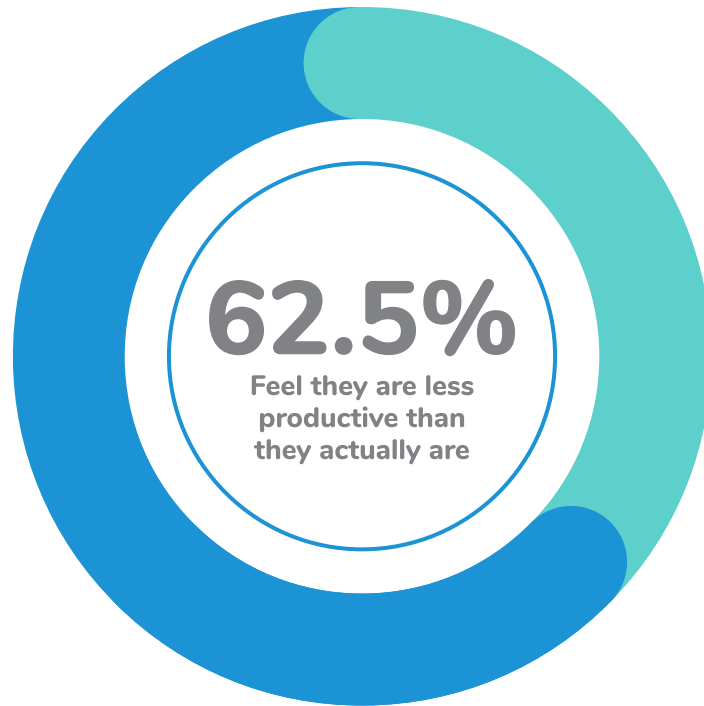
New graduates are highly productive. When we asked PTs how many patients they saw per day, we learned that the average new graduate physical therapist sees 9.93 patients each day. Additionally, it took these therapists an average of 2.22 months to reach full productivity.

Keep in mind that these very same PTs said that the most experienced therapist in their clinic sees 10.87 patients per day. This equates to about 1 extra patient each day and tells us that new grad PTs are highly productive.



Do you feel that the industry thinks new grads are less productive than they actually are?

62.5% of new grads said that they believe the PT industry thinks they are less productive than they actually are.

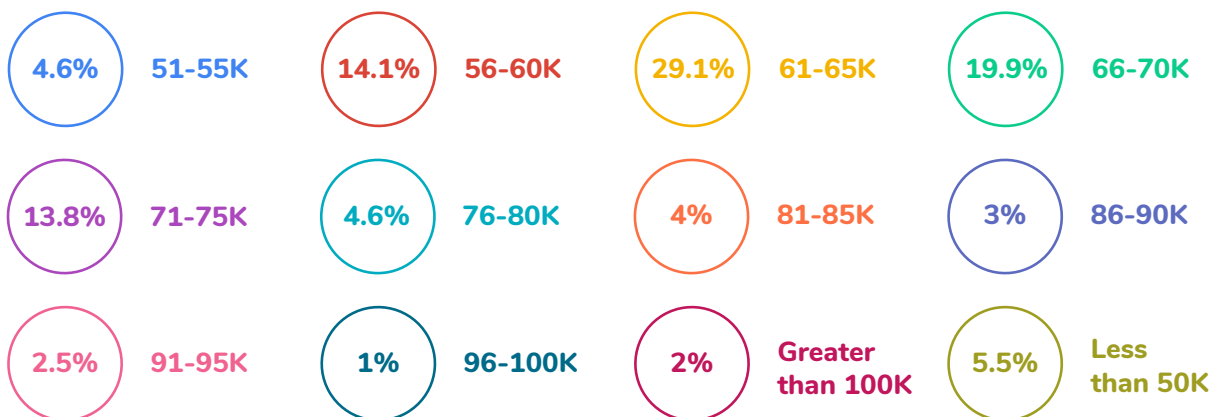
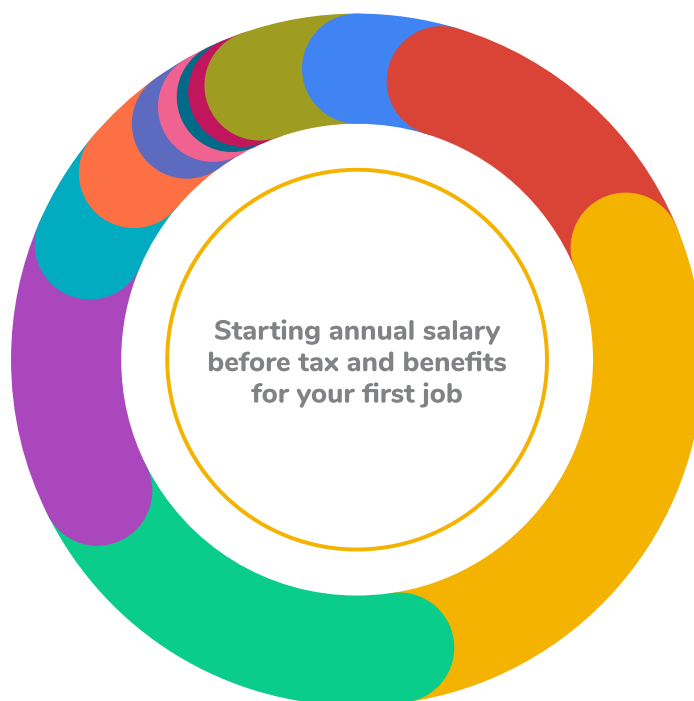


New Grad PTs And The Money Question

Any quick dive into PT message boards illustrates one of the key reasons for attrition in the field: burnout. Whether it arises from disillusionment with growing productivity requirements or from financial concerns, burnout has a significant effect on the field.

What was your starting annual salary before tax and benefits for your first job?

The majority of PTs' first jobs had a starting salary in the \$61-66k range. Another almost 33% saw starting salaries of up to \$75k. While this likely has much to do with setting, we always hope that some PTs are doing their research and negotiating their salaries!



Does your student debt motivate you to work harder, longer hours, or less desirable days?

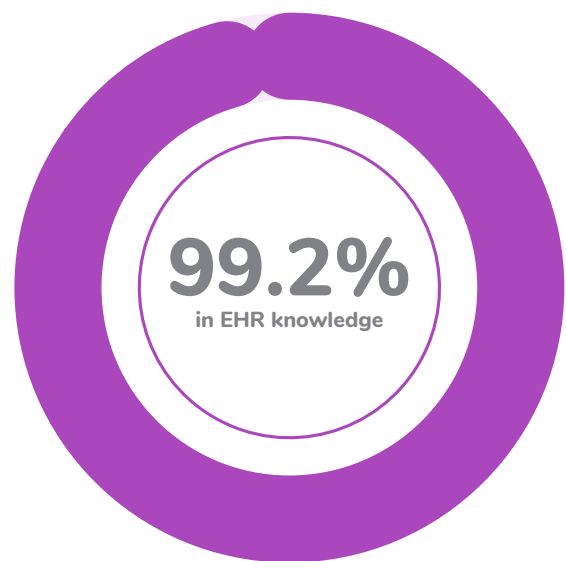
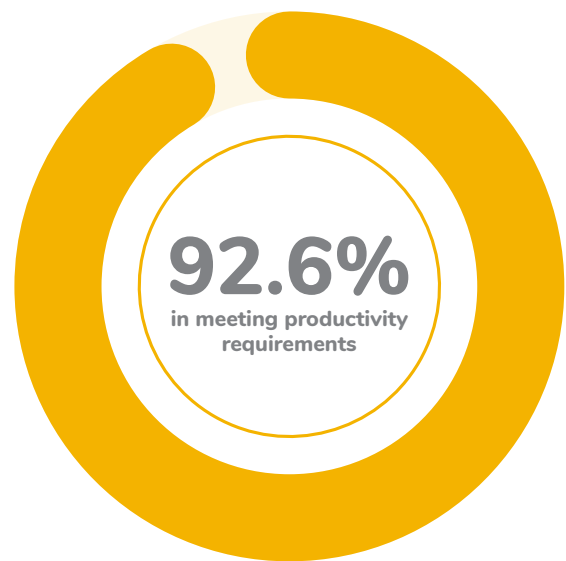
Remember those possible factors for burnout we mentioned earlier? PTs work really hard, and much of that is motivated by student debt. More than half of the PTs we surveyed replied that their student debt motivated them to work longer hours and less desirable days.



What New Grad PTs Are Bringing To A Practice

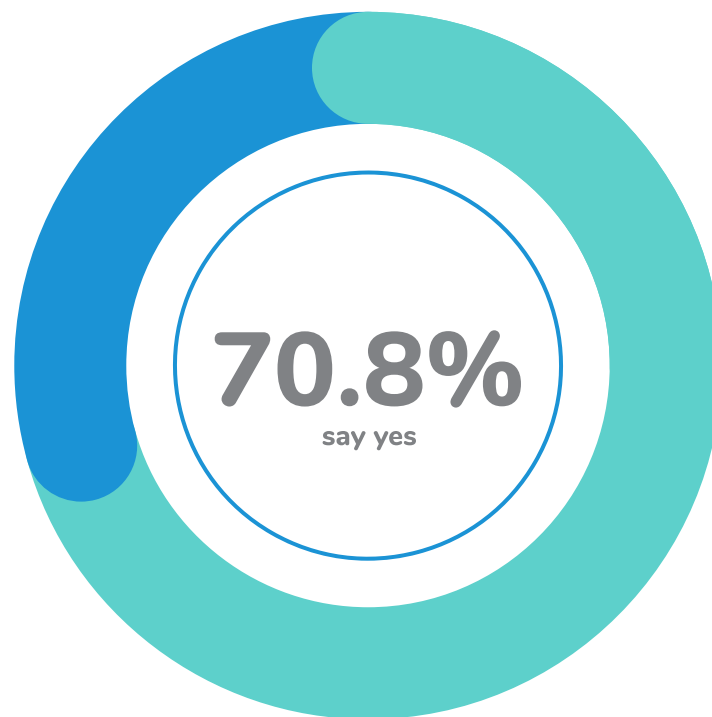
New graduate physical therapists have a wide variety of skills—from marketing and advertising, to EHR knowledge, to meeting productivity requirements and treating and managing patients, new grad PTs are confident in their skills.

New graduate PTs felt their skills were equal to or better than the previous generations of PTs in the following categories:



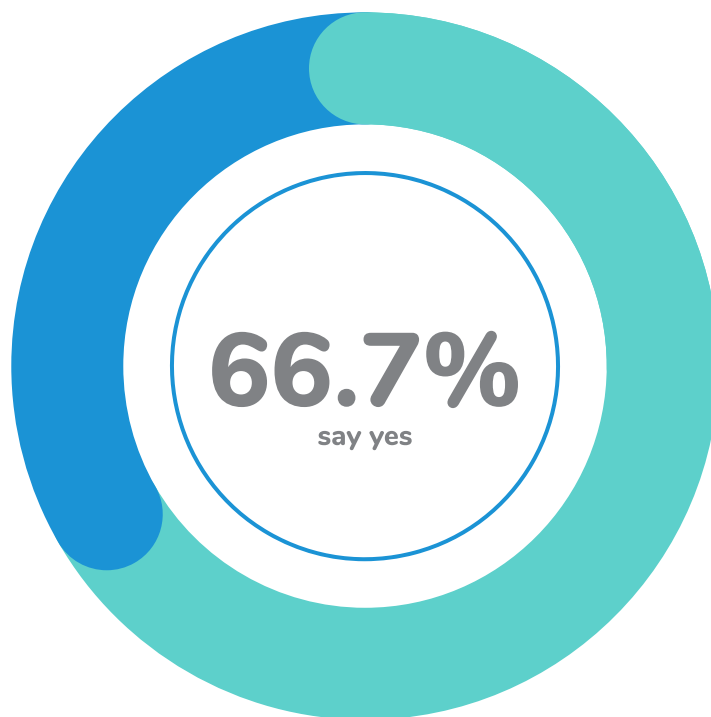
Do you feel that physical therapy school trained and prepared you better for patient care than a physical therapist who graduated over 10 years ago?

A whopping 70.8% of new graduates felt that physical therapy school trained and prepared them better for patient care than physical therapists who graduated over 10 years ago.



Do you feel that you have skills and abilities today that could help you grow and maintain a practice that the senior therapist doesn't have?

Two-thirds of the PTs who responded said that they have skills and abilities that can help grow a practice. If you're applying for jobs, think about what you can bring to a practice—and if you're hiring, think about what skills will help your practice grow.

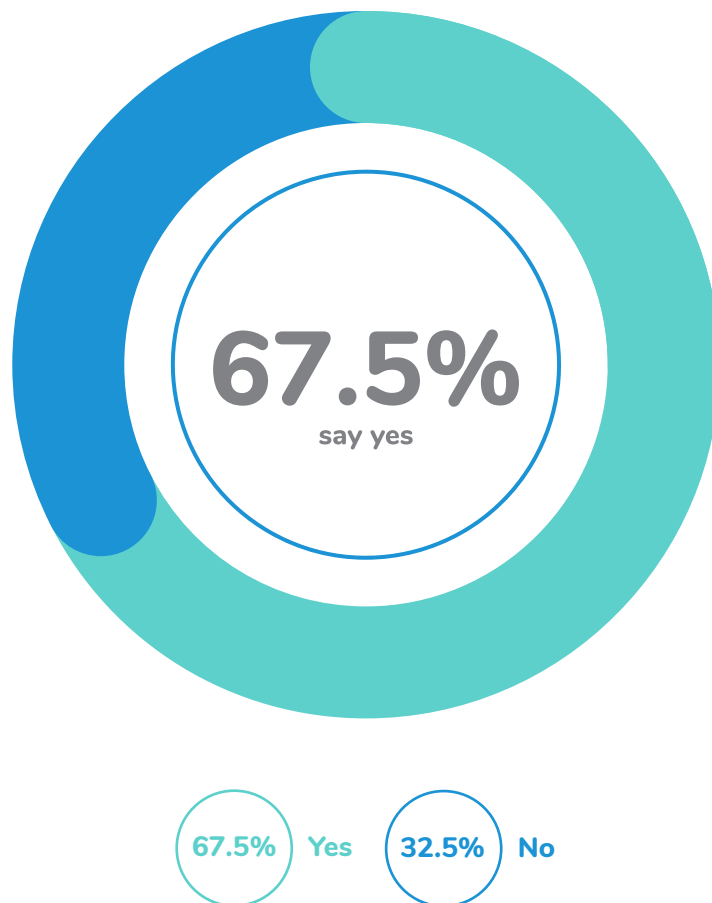


New Grad PTs And The Future of The Profession

The biggest question in our surveys is always about the future. Do new PTs feel optimistic,

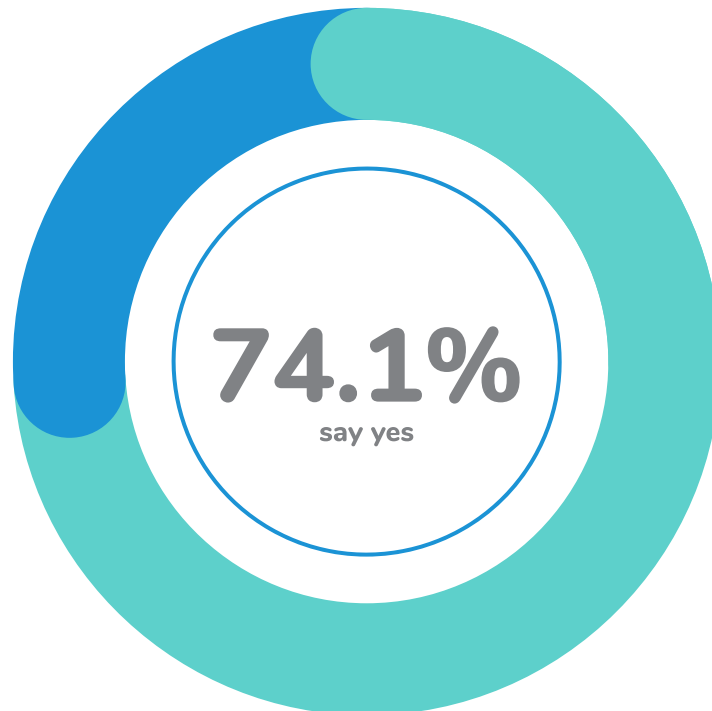
Do you feel that as a new grad you are more motivated about your job than physical therapists who have been in the field for long time?

Interestingly, 67.5% of new PTs said they are more motivated about their job than physical therapists who have been in the field for a long time.



Are you planning on getting additional certifications beyond the DPT?

Not only are PTs confident in their existing skills, but a majority plan to seek extra certifications beyond the DPT.



If you're with a healthcare facility or staffing company that employs physical therapists, we're here to support you talent acquisition and recruitment-marketing solutions. If you're a new graduate physical therapist, we are here to support you with education, mentorship, and job opportunities that fit your life goals.

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