



# Foundations for SMA Physical Therapists; a STEP-IN Clinical Workshop

November 8 – November 10, 2024  
Utrecht, Netherlands



## Overview

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With the availability and development of disease-modifying therapies for individuals with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), there are new emerging phenotypes that must be characterized, and new treatment paradigms tested. Moreover, given the rapidly growing field of SMA treatments, there is an urgent need to ensure the prescribed standards of care are delivered to all individuals with SMA regardless of age, clinical trial participation, treatment, or region. However, the majority of physical therapists are not currently prepared to deliver this service at this time because they lack the necessary knowledge, skills and resources. In part, this deficiency may be addressed through appropriate education resources that are accessible to all and can deliver precise details on standards for both assessment and management. The SMA Teaching and Excellence for Physiotherapists; International Network (STEP-IN) initiative is a program whose purpose is to address this need.

Competency-based education is an approach that is based on the community and patient needs that has been adopted in medicine and other health professions including physical therapy.

STEP-IN aims to address the current unmet need for expertise and resources to provide outstanding care for SMA patients around the world through a comprehensive education program. Embedded in a framework of educational expertise, STEP-IN provides a comprehensive resource, which would be suitable for the novice therapist, those developing expertise, as well as suitable for therapists working in the community setting or in a specialist tertiary center, and for those working purely in the clinic or in a research setting or both. The aim is to create a uniform educational program that enables and empowers therapists to deliver appropriate standards of care.

## Needs Assessment

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STEP-IN aims to address the current unmet need for expertise and resources to provide outstanding care for patients with SMA across the lifespan and phenotypic spectrum around the world through a comprehensive competency-based education program. Competency-based education is an approach that is outcome based instead of process-based, where competence is assessed not assumed. The “outcomes” of such a program are based on the community and patient needs that have been adopted in medicine and other health professions including physical therapy. The core purpose of this educational initiative is:

1. Develop expertise and shared educational resources for PTs who provide clinical care or conduct research for children and adults with SMA.
2. Develop a multidimensional infrastructure that includes an extensive curriculum, resources, and a platform that fosters education, mentorship, collaboration, and research.

*Why is there a need for a competency-based education program for PTs in SMA and neuromuscular disease (NMD) more broadly?*

- Reassures the community that PTs are capable of safely providing high quality care to individuals with SMA and NMD.
- Provides a standard for PTs participating in NMD in clinics and in clinical trials.

- NMD is a group of rare disorders seldom covered in detail in entry-level PT education. With the availability of disease modifying therapies, there is a growing demand on non-specialist PTs to manage and treat these patients. Therefore, post-graduate NMD specific PT training is paramount.
- Existing educational opportunities (1) are not based on consensus defined outcomes and (2) do not ensure that participants have learned and are able to apply the knowledge in the workplace.

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## Curriculum

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The STEP-IN educational program includes three phases:

**Phase I:** Learners will complete various foundational on-line modules with multiple assessment points throughout.

**Phase II:** Learners will participate in a 2.5 day in-person workshop incorporating hands-on laboratory activities under the guidance of facilitators as well as live SMA patient assessment.

**Phase III:** Learners will be evaluated on the 6 Core and 1 Elective Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs) using an entrustment supervision scale by their workplace mentor / supervisor.

The STEP-IN educational framework incorporates Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs) to assess competency. EPAs are key tasks of a discipline that an individual can be trusted to perform in a given health care context, once sufficient competence has been demonstrated. Six core EPAs and 1 elective EPA have been identified for SMA physical therapists.

The educational materials for the foundational on-line content for this educational program includes eight interactive modules, five interactive case studies and item by item review of four core SMA assessment scales.

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## Participants

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### Participant Selection:

Inclusion Criteria for Participants:

- Experience – licensed and practicing physical therapist for at least 1 year
- Current or expected role in a setting which includes SMA patients (neuromuscular focused clinic workplace preferred)
- Able to attend the 2.5 day in-person workshop in Utrecht, November 8-10, 2024
- Mentor or supervisor available for workplace-based evaluation

Participants will apply through an on-line application posted on the STEP-IN website from May 1st, 2024 ([www.stepinsma.org](http://www.stepinsma.org)). The application will solicit demographic information (including institution, address, setting, job title, licensure, years of experience in SMA). The applicant will be required to identify their mentor for work-based assessments and explain in a short essay how this workshop and program will benefit them. Additionally, two references in support of their participation will be required. A review board will select participants based-on the inclusion criteria, essay and references.

For any questions about the program, please email [info@stepinsma.org](mailto:info@stepinsma.org)