
Kentucky State Board of Physical Therapy

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Re: Opinion and Declaratory Ruling regarding state law governing the utilization of Physical Therapist's Assistants in patient screening by the Kentucky State Board of Physical Therapy

This correspondence is in response to various inquiries to the Board asking for an opinion from the Kentucky State Board of Physical Therapy on several issues regarding whether and how physical therapist's assistants (PTAs) may be used in patient screening.

Please keep in mind that this correspondence is an opinion of the Board based solely on the facts presented, which will be summarized below. The Board has authorized this opinion as an Opinion and Declaratory Ruling pursuant to KRS 13A.130(3) and KRS 13A.010(2)(b) as the agency with jurisdiction to interpret the statutes and regulations governing the practice of physical therapy in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

I. Whether a PTA may be used to screen patients.

The Board is first presented with the question whether a PTA may be used to screen patients. The Board is aware that from the initial contact with a physical therapy office, the patient is asked to complete a medical and health history, and may further be initially examined by a professional in the physical therapy practice.

The Board is of the opinion that a PTA may be directed by the physical therapist (PT) simply to gather relevant information as it relates to the screening process without formalizing an evaluation or a plan of treatment.

201 KAR 22:053, the Code of Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Physical Therapists and Physical Therapist's Assistants, provides at Section 4(1) that "When engaged in the practice of physical therapy, the physical therapist's assistant shall provide services under the supervision and direction of the physical therapist." Nothing in this section of the regulation prohibits a PTA from doing an initial screening so long as this is done "under the supervision and direction of the physical therapist."

II. How may a PTA be used in this capacity?

201 KAR 22:053 Section 4(3) provides that a PTA may “initiate treatment only after evaluation by the physical therapist.” The Board does not interpret the simple gathering of medical and health history facts to be “treatment” for purposes of the regulation. Therefore, it follows that the patient may see a PTA first, so long as the services provided by the PTA before the PT has seen the patient are “under the supervision and direction of the PT” and so long as the PTA does not render “treatment” but limits the services to mere fact finding.

This interpretation is further supported by other Board regulations. 201 KAR 22:053 Section 4(4) states that the PTA may “upon direction from the physical therapist, gather data relating to the patient’s disability, but not determine the significance of the data as it pertains to the development of the plan of care.” For example, the PTA may gather preliminary data on the patient in regard to identifying a patient as an appropriate candidate to receive an evaluation by the PT. The physical therapist shall then review the data and determine if a full evaluation shall be performed in order to develop a plan of care. Such initial service by the PTA does not, in the opinion of the Board, constitute the development of a “plan of care.”

Finally, all PTAs must comply with the supervision plan of their PT. *See*. 201 KAR 22:053 Section 4(6)(all PTAs must “comply with the plan of supervision established by the physical therapist”).

III. Conclusion.

As the agency authorized by the Kentucky General Assembly to regulate the practice of physical therapy in this state, the Board is empowered to interpret its statutes and regulations. In summary, it is the opinion of this Board that a PTA may be used to obtain medical and health history information only. The PTA may assist in the gathering of preliminary information that relates to patient screening for purposes of identifying if a physical evaluation is indicated. No PTA may initiate treatment of a patient prior to the initial evaluation by the supervising physical therapist.

Sincerely yours,

Kentucky State Board of Physical Therapy
Joan Dalton, P.T., Chair

By: _____.
Rebecca E. Klusch, Executive Director
CC: Board Members