
Kentucky State Board of Physical Therapy

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April 19, 1999

Re: Opinion and Declaratory Ruling by the Kentucky State Board of Physical Therapy regarding treatment by a physical therapist's assistant

This correspondence is in response to your letter dated April, 1999 asking for an opinion from the Kentucky State Board of Physical Therapy on whether a physical therapist's assistant ("PTA") can begin treatment on a patient before that patient is seen by a physical therapist.

Please keep in mind that this correspondence is an opinion of the Board based solely on the facts you have presented, which will be summarized below. The Board has authorized this opinion to you 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.

Whether a PTA can initiate treatment on a patient.

The Board is presented with the question whether a PTA can begin treatment of a patient before that patient is seen by a physical therapist and thus before an initial evaluation is done by the physical therapist.

KRS Chapter 327 gives the Board the power to regulate PTAs and to promulgate regulations regarding, among other things, their "limitations of activities and supervision." 201 KAR 22:053 § 4, Standards of Practice for the Physical Therapist's Assistant, sets forth those limitations of activities and supervision requirements.

When engaged in the practice of physical therapy, the physical therapist's assistant shall:

- (1) Provide services only under the supervision and direction of a physical therapist;*
- (2) Refuse to carry out procedures that he believes are not in the best interest of the patient or that he is not competent to provide by training or skill level;*
- (3) Initiate treatment only after evaluation by the physical therapist;*
- (4) 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*

- (5) Refer to the physical therapist inquiries that require an interpretation of patient information related to rehabilitation potential;*
- (6) Comply with the plan of supervision established by the physical therapist; and*
- (7) Communicate with the physical therapist any change or lack of change which occurs in the patient's condition which may indicate the need for reassessment. 201 KAR 22:053 § 4(emphasis added).*

As can be seen from the regulation itself, a PTA can provide services only after evaluation by a physical therapist.

Just as the PTA is under this duty, so, too, is a physical therapist only to allow a PTA to provide services after conducting an initial evaluation. 201 KAR 22:053 § 5(3)(b) provides in relevant part:

- When supervising the physical therapist's assistant and supportive personnel, the physical therapist shall: . . . (3) Be responsible for:*
- (b) Conducting the initial physical therapy evaluation.*

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, with the above cited regulations now examined, the Board is of the clear opinion that a PTA cannot provide services until a physical therapist has performed an initial evaluation. Thereafter, a PTA can perform any duty that the PTA is competent to perform so long as all other requirements for supervision by the physical therapist are met.

Sincerely yours,

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

Nancy Brinly, P.T., Executive Secretary

cc: Board members