
Kentucky State Board of Physical Therapy

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December 19, 2001

Sarah Martin, P.T.
Rehab Services
Murray-Calloway County Hospital
803 Poplar Street
Murray, Kentucky 42071

Re: Opinion and Declaratory Ruling regarding state law governing Physical Therapist's Assistants and verbal communications by a physician by the Kentucky State Board of Physical Therapy

Dear Ms. Martin:

This correspondence is in response to your letter dated October 3, 2001, asking for an opinion from the Kentucky State Board of Physical Therapy on the issue regarding Physical Therapist's Assistants and verbal communications or instructions by a physician.

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 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.

I. Whether a Physical Therapist's Assistant may write verbal communications or instructions of a physician.

The Board is presented with the question whether the Physical Therapist's Assistant may write verbal communications or instructions of a physician. The Board understands that during the treatment of an established physical therapy patient, or even prior to that treatment being commenced by a physical therapist, a physician may make a verbal communication for specific physical therapy treatment to be done on the patient.

There is nothing in KRS Chapter 327 that prevents a Physical Therapist's Assistant from writing the verbal communications or other instructions of whatever oral nature of a physician. However, it is only the Physical Therapist that may interpret and carry out those for physical therapy treatment. Carrying out those may be done by the Physical Therapist's Assistant under the supervision of the Physical Therapist as mandated by 201 KAR 22:053 Section 4(1) and (3) which mandates that the PTA "provide services only under the supervision and direction of a physical therapist" and "initiate treatment only after evaluation by the physical therapist."

This is true regardless of whether a patient presents him/herself for physical therapy directly, whether the patient presents upon written referral from a physician, or whether the patient presents upon a verbal instruction from a physician that is reduced to writing by anyone for the physical therapist to interpret and carry out.

The best practice anytime that verbal instructions are taken by the Physical Therapist, or by anyone acting under the authority of the Physical Therapist, such as a PTA, is to write down those verbal communications for inclusion in the patient's physical therapy records. Such information shall also include the time and date of the verbal communication, and who wrote down the verbal communication with the signature of that person.

The Physical Therapist shall always be responsible for "interpreting any referral" (201 KAR 22:053 Section 5(3)(a)) regardless of whether such a referral is in writing or is verbal from a physician, and regardless of whether any further physician communications thereafter are in writing or verbal.

II. 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, PTAs may reduce to writing the verbal communications and instructions of physicians for review and implementation by the Physical Therapist, who shall in turn meet the documentation requirements listed above.

Sincerely yours,

Kentucky State Board of Physical Therapy
Sandra S. Payne, P.T., Chair

Rebecca Klusch Hughes, Executive Director

cc: Board members