

THE PREVENT INTERRUPTIONS IN PHYSICAL THERAPY ACT (H.R. 5453)

POSITION

The American Physical Therapy Association strongly supports the Prevent Interruptions in Physical Therapy Act of 2019 (H.R. 5453), legislation that would allow physical therapists in all geographic regions of the United States to enter into locum tenens arrangements under Medicare. H.R. 5453 was introduced in the House of Representatives by Reps. Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM) and Gus Bilirakis (R-FL).

BACKGROUND

The ability to bring in a replacement provider during a provider's temporary absences for illness, pregnancy, vacation, or continuing medical education is known as locum tenens.

The 21st Century Cures Act of 2016 contained a provision that added physical therapists to the health care professionals who may use locum tenens under Medicare. This allows a physical therapist to bring in another licensed physical therapist to treat Medicare patients and bill Medicare through the practice provider number during temporary absences. The law, however, applies only to physical therapists in non-Metropolitan Statistical Areas, Medically Underserved Areas, and Health Professions Shortage Areas as defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This limitation prohibits many physical therapists in private practice from taking needed absences without interrupting patient care. Locum tenens arrangements are beneficial to both patients and providers, as care is continued by another licensed, qualified provider during a temporary absence.

IMPACT OF LOCUM TENENS

According to 2018 data shared by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2,465 Medicare beneficiaries were able to access medically necessary physical therapy services from 219 physical therapists through the utilization of locum tenens under current law. This data illustrates the importance of locum

tenens. Expanding the option of locum tenens for physical therapists and the patients they serve to all geographic areas will ensure patient access for all Medicare beneficiaries. For physical therapy, an interruption in care can lead to patient regression and higher costs to the health care system over time. In addition, a locum tenens provider can keep a small practice open to serve patients who would otherwise have to travel longer distances to another provider. Using these arrangements, providers are able to ensure that their patient care does not lapse and that appointments are not missed at the same clinic.

STANDARD OF CARE

Under a locum tenens arrangement a provider can bill and receive payment for the replacement provider's services. This saves the practice considerable time over having to add a new employee to the practice, especially if the absence is unexpected. It also ensures continuation of services for patients. Locum tenens arrangements under Medicare must meet regulatory standards, including the identification of these services through a modifier on the claim form and a 60-day limitation on the use of a temporary provider.

Enactment of the Prevent Interruptions in Physical Therapy Act (H.R. 5453) would relieve the burden on private practitioners as well as provide uninterrupted patient care to Medicare beneficiaries. It also would be cost effective. Because our government and tax dollars are funding Medicare, it is important that Medicare recipients are treated consistently and efficiently to prevent regression. Patients who experience regression may potentially need more care, resulting in an increase of expenses and an unnecessary barrier to patient care. This legislation would improve the quality of life of Medicare patients and enable physical therapists to take off work when necessary.

FACTS ABOUT PHYSICAL THERAPISTS AND PHYSICAL THERAPIST ASSISTANTS



WHO WE ARE

Physical therapists (PTs) are health care professionals who diagnose and treat individuals of all ages, from newborns to the very old, who have medical problems or other health related conditions that limit their ability to move and perform functional activities in their daily lives. PTs also work with individuals to prevent the loss of mobility before it occurs by developing fitness- and wellness-oriented programs for healthier and more active lifestyles.

Physical therapist assistants (PTAs) provide selective physical therapist interventions under the direction and supervision of physical therapists.

WHAT WE DO

PTs examine each individual and develop a plan of care using treatment techniques to promote the ability to move, reduce pain, restore function, and prevent disability. Under the direction and supervision of the PT, PTAs provide selective physical therapist interventions based on the developed plan of care.

WHERE WE PRACTICE

PTs and PTAs provide care for people in a variety of settings, including outpatient clinics or offices; inpatient rehabilitation facilities; skilled nursing, extended care, or subacute facilities; education or research centers; schools; hospices; industrial, workplace, or other occupational environments; and fitness centers and sports training facilities.

EDUCATION AND LICENSURE

All PTs must receive a degree from an accredited physical therapist program before taking and passing a national licensure exam that permits them to practice. Since 2015, all accredited programs award the doctor of physical therapy degree. State licensure is required in each state in which a PT practices. PTAs must complete a two-year associate's degree and are licensed, certified, or registered in most states.

AMERICAN PHYSICAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION

The American Physical Therapy Association is a national organization representing more than 100,000 physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and students nationwide. Its goal is to foster advancements in physical therapist education, practice, and research.

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Cosponsor H.R. 5453 Today!

For additional information, contact the American Physical Therapy Association's Government Affairs Department at 703/706-8533 or advocacy@apta.org.