



APTA Brief on State Government Affairs

State: Georgia

Issue(s): Patient Access to PT Services (direct access)
Term and Title Protection
Physical Therapy Scope of Practice

Bill number: HB 505

Text of legislation: <http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/HB/505>

On Tuesday, May 5, 2015, Georgia Governor Nathan Deal signed legislation that significantly modernizes the Georgia physical therapy practice act. HB 505 improves patient access to physical therapist services, revises the definition of the scope of practice for physical therapy, provides recognition of services delivered via telehealth, and expands and strengthens term and title protection. The legislation was sponsored by Georgia State Rep Sharon Cooper and advocated by the Physical Therapy Association of Georgia (PTAG). The new law becomes effective July 1, 2015.

Patient Access to PT Services

The new law allows physical therapists who meet certain education or experience requirements to treat without a referral or previous medical diagnosis for up to 21 days from the date of initiation of a physical therapy plan of intervention, or 8 visits. The 21 days or 8 visits do not apply to:

- Services provided for health promotion, wellness, fitness, or maintenance purposes
- Patients diagnosed within the previous 9 months with a neuromuscular or developmental condition when the evaluation, treatment, or services are being provided for problems or symptoms associated with that previously diagnosed condition
- Patients diagnosed within the previous 90 days with a chronic musculoskeletal condition noted by a current relevant document from an appropriate licensed health care provider

Georgia first achieved limited direct access in 2006; however, the law restricted direct access to only patients who had a previous medical diagnosis, or if the physical therapist consulted with a physician before initiating treatment.



Scope of Practice

HB 505 modernizes the physical therapist scope of practice by providing for a completely new definition for the practice of physical therapy. The revised definition clarifies that the scope of practice for physical therapists includes a physical therapy diagnosis and prognosis for physical therapist services. The legislation also establishes that physical therapist practice includes services delivered via telehealth.

Term and Title Protection

HB 505 adds explicit protection for the term “physical therapy” and prohibits a person or business from utilizing or advertising the term unless the services are provided by, or under the direction, of a licensed physical therapist. In addition, the legislation provides new explicit protection for the titles "physiotherapist" and "doctor of physical therapy," and extends specific protection for the DPT.

Statement from Physical Therapy Association of Georgia (PTAG)

“HB 505 is a milestone that enhances access to care for all Georgians,” said Dr. Joseph M. Donnelly, PT, DHS, OCS, president of the Physical Therapy Association of Georgia. “For many Georgians, the previous physician consultation mandate had become extremely burdensome, increasing the overall cost of their care by requiring added office visits, added out-of-pocket co-pays, and extra time off from work, all of which were strong deterrents to obtaining timely care – especially for parents of children with rehabilitative needs.”

APTA provided PTAG with a 2015 APTA State Advocacy Grant to assist with the effort.

Of note: Georgia was the first state in the country to explicitly add dry needling to its practice act in 2011. HB 505 maintains dry needling in the new definition for physical therapy, however physical therapists in Georgia must continue to consult with a physician before utilizing dry needling for patients seen via direct access.