

Position on Thrust Joint Manipulation Provided by Physical Therapists



An American Physical Therapy Association White Paper

Executive Summary

Although Thrust joint manipulation (TJM) has been provided by physical therapists since the inception of the profession and physical therapists have published the majority of the research to demonstrate TJM effectiveness, the chiropractic profession has mounted legislative and regulatory strategies to prohibit physical therapist use of these procedures. Although chiropractors use arguments of patient safety and education as arguments against physical therapists use of TJM, it is quite evident the primary purpose of these legislation and regularity assaults is driven by economic motives.

TJM and Physical Therapist Practice: Historical and Current Overview

The history of manipulation in recorded history can be traced back to the days of Hippocrates, the father of medicine (460-355 B.C.), and documentation of manipulation being a part of physical therapist practice dates back to the beginning of the profession. With early influence of internationally recognized leaders in manual physical therapy plus new research findings, physical therapists have assumed leadership role as the practice of TJM and associated education continues to evolve.

TJM and Physical Therapist Training

Physical therapist TJM training starts in professional education (entry-level) programs. Entry-level program curricula design and implementation are primarily directed by *A Normative Model of Physical Therapist Professional Education (Normative Model)* and the Evaluative Criteria For Accreditation of Educational Programs for the Preparation of Physical Therapists (Evaluative Criteria) used by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE). Both the Normative model and the CAPTE evaluative criteria are very specific that both thrust and non-thrust manipulation techniques for the spine and extremities must be taught in physical therapist entry-level curriculum.

TJM and Patient Safety

Chiropractors claim that manipulation provided by PTs place the public at risk for serious injury. The majority of the injuries and deaths from cervical spine manipulation have occurred at the hands of a chiropractor, while PTs were involved in fewer than 2% of the injury cases, and no deaths have been attributed to PTs. PTs have an excellent medical-legal track record of patient safety and the use of TJM. HPSO, the primary liability insurance carrier for physical therapists in the United States, has confirmed that there are no higher claims losses for PTs who utilize TJM than for those who use other types of treatments.

Research Supporting the Use of Manipulation

Physical therapists are leading the effort to establish the evidenced-based framework for safe and appropriate use of TJM in treating movement disorders. The fact that physical therapist researchers and clinicians are leading the way in demonstrating the effectiveness of TJM further illustrates that PTs are safe and effective providers of TJM for treatment of spinal disorders.

Summary

Based on the coordinated, strategic chiropractic legislative activities during the past 20 years, it is clear the chiropractic profession has established a national agenda to prevent PTs from using TJM. Their claims that PTs are not adequately trained and that patients are at risk receiving TJM from PTs have no factual basis.