

The Prevent Interruptions In Physical Therapy Act (H.R. 1617/S. 793)



Position

The American Physical Therapy Association strongly supports the Prevent Interruptions in Physical Therapy Act of 2023 (H.R. 1617/S. 793), legislation that would allow physical therapists in all geographic regions of the United States to enter into locum tenens arrangements under Medicare. H.R. 1617 was introduced in the House of Representatives by Reps. Gus Bilirakis, R-Fla., and Paul Tonko, D-N.Y. S. 793 was introduced by Sens. Ben Ray Lujan, D-N.M., and John Thune, R-S.D.

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 & 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. 1617/S. 793) 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 are movement experts who help to optimize people's physical function, movement, performance, health, quality of life, and well-being. Physical therapists evaluate, diagnose, and manage movement conditions for individuals, and they also provide contributions to public health services aimed at improving population health and the human experience. Physical therapist assistants are educated and licensed or certified clinicians who provide care under the direction and supervision of a licensed physical therapist. PTs and PTAs care for people of all ages and abilities.

What We Do

After performing an evaluation and making a diagnosis, physical therapists create and implement personalized plans based on best available evidence to help their patients improve mobility, manage pain and other chronic conditions, recover from injury, and prevent future injury and chronic disease. PTs and PTAs empower people to be active participants in their care and well-being. They practice collaboratively with other health professionals to ensure the best clinical outcomes.

Where We Practice

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

Education and Licensure

As of 2016, all PTs must receive a doctor of physical therapy degree from an accredited physical therapist education program before taking and passing a national licensure exam that permits them to practice. Licensure is required in each state (or other jurisdiction, including the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands) in which a PT practices. PTAs must complete a two-year associate's degree from an accredited physical therapist assistant program and pass a national exam. State licensure or certification is required in each state (or jurisdiction) in which a PTA works.

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 of physical therapy nationwide. Our mission is to build a community that advances the profession of physical therapy to improve the health of society.



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