

**DIRECTION AND SUPERVISION OF THE PHYSICAL THERAPIST ASSISTANT HOD P06-18-28-35** [Amended: HOD P06-05-18-26; HOD 06-00-16-27; HOD 06-99-07-11; HOD 06-96-30-42; HOD 06-95-11-06; HOD 06-93-08-09; HOD 06-85-20-41; Initial: HOD 06-84-16-72/HOD 06-78-22-61/HOD 06-77-19-37] [Position]

Physical therapist practice and the practice of physical therapy are synonymous. Both phrases are inclusive of patient and client management, and direction and supervision. Direction and supervision apply to the physical therapist assistant, who is the only individual who assists a physical therapist in practice. The utilization of other support personnel, whether in the performance of tasks or clerical activities, relates to the efficient operation of the physical therapy service.

Physical therapists are responsible for providing safe, accessible, cost-effective, and evidence-based services. Services are rendered directly by the physical therapist and with responsible utilization of physical therapist assistants. The physical therapist's practice responsibility for patient and client management includes examination, evaluation, diagnosis, prognosis, intervention, and outcomes. Physical therapist assistants may be appropriately utilized in components of intervention and in collection of selected examination and outcomes data.

Direction and supervision are essential in the provision of quality physical therapist services. The degree of direction and supervision necessary for ensuring quality physical therapist services is dependent upon many factors, including the education, experiences, and responsibilities of the parties involved, as well as the organizational structure where physical therapist services are provided.

Regardless of the setting in which the physical therapist service is provided, the following responsibilities must be borne solely by the physical therapist:

1. Interpretation of referrals when available
2. Evaluation, diagnosis, and prognosis
3. Development or modification of a plan of care, which is based on the initial examination or reexamination and includes the physical therapy goals and outcomes
4. Determination of when the expertise and decision-making capability of the physical therapist requires the physical therapist to personally render services and when it may be appropriate to utilize the physical therapist assistant
5. Revision of the plan of care when indicated
6. Conclusion of an episode of care
7. Responsibility for any "hand off" communication
8. Oversight of all documentation for services rendered to each patient or client

Only the physical therapist performs the initial examination and reexamination of the patient and may utilize the physical therapist assistant in collection of selected examination and outcomes data.

The physical therapist is responsible for services provided when the physical therapist's plan of care involves the physical therapist assistant. Regardless of the setting in which the service is provided, the determination to utilize physical therapist assistants requires the education, expertise, and professional judgment of a physical therapist as described by the *Standards of Practice for Physical Therapy*, the *Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapist*, and the *APTA Guide for Professional Conduct*.

In determining the appropriate extent of assistance from the physical therapist assistant, the physical therapist considers:

- The physical therapist assistant's education, training, experience, and skill level

- Patient or client criticality, acuity, stability, and complexity
- The predictability of the consequences
- The setting in which the care is being delivered
- Federal and state statutes
- Liability and risk management concerns
- The mission of physical therapist services for the setting
- The needed frequency of reexamination

## Physical Therapist Assistant

### Definition

The physical therapist assistant assists the physical therapist in the provision of physical therapy. The physical therapist assistant is a graduate of a physical therapist assistant program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education.

### Utilization

The physical therapist is directly responsible for the actions of the physical therapist assistant in all practice settings. The physical therapist assistant may provide services under the direction and at least general supervision of the physical therapist. In general supervision, the physical therapist is not required to be on site for direction and supervision but must be available at least by telecommunication. The ability of the physical therapist assistant to provide services shall be assessed on an ongoing basis by the supervising physical therapist.

Services provided by the physical therapist assistant must be consistent with safe and legal physical therapist practice and shall be predicated on the following factors: complexity and acuity of the patient's or client's needs; proximity and accessibility to the physical therapist; supervision available in the event of emergencies or critical events; and type of setting in which the service is provided. The physical therapist assistant makes modifications to elements of the intervention either to progress the patient or client as directed by the physical therapist or to ensure patient or client safety and comfort.

When supervising the physical therapist assistant in any offsite setting, the following requirements must be observed:

1. A physical therapist must be accessible by telecommunication to the physical therapist assistant at all times while the physical therapist assistant is providing services to patients and clients.
2. There must be regularly scheduled and documented conferences with the physical therapist assistant regarding patients and clients, the frequency of which is determined by the needs of the patient or client and the needs of the physical therapist assistant.
3. In situations in which a physical therapist assistant is involved in the care of a patient or client, a supervisory visit by the physical therapist:
  - a. Shall be made upon the physical therapist assistant's request for a reexamination, when a change in the plan of care is needed, prior to any planned conclusion of the episode of care, and in response to a change in the patient's or client's medical status
  - b. Shall be made at least once a month, or at a higher frequency when established by the physical therapist, in accordance with the needs of the patient or client
  - c. Shall include:
    - i. An onsite reexamination of the patient or client
    - ii. Onsite review of the plan of care with appropriate revision or termination
    - iii. Evaluation of need and recommendation for utilization of outside resources

### Explanation of Reference Numbers:

HOD P00-00-00-00 stands for House of Delegates/month/year/page/vote in the House of Delegates minutes; the "P" indicates that it is a position (see below). For example, HOD P06-17-05-04 means that this position can be found in the June 2017 House of Delegates minutes on Page 5 and that it was Vote 4.

P: Position | S: Standard | G: Guideline | Y: Policy | R: Procedure