

INFORMAL INTERPRETATIONS BY THE BOARD OF PHYSICAL THERAPY

The following are informal interpretations by the Board of Physical Therapy resulting from questions reviewed and discussed by the Board. These informal interpretations are for informational and explanatory purposes only, based solely on the information provided at the time, and are not an official opinion or decision, and therefore, are not to be viewed as binding on the Board.

I. Scope of Practice

1. **Can physical therapists perform electromyography (EMG) or nerve conduction studies without physician supervision?** – A physical therapist is permitted to perform a patient evaluation (only) for surface EMG. “Treatment” of a patient does require a referral from a physician. A physical therapist shall not use invasive procedures defined as “the breaking or puncturing of a person’s good skin integrity, for example, through surgery or injections.” (2/8/94)
2. **Are physical therapists in the State of Hawaii able to perform sharp debridement on wounds to remove necrotic tissue to facilitate wound healing?** – It is the intent of section 462J-2.5, HRS to not allow breaking of good (healthy) or intact tissue and does not include dead or necrotic tissue, however, appropriate debridement procedures are to be prescribed by the referring physician and performed with sound medical judgment by the physical therapist. (11/12/96)
3. **Can a physical therapist perform “myofascial release techniques” or “treat myofascial syndromes”?** – Soft tissue techniques such as myofascial release falls under the physical therapy practice act which includes but is not limited to “therapeutic massage” and “mobilization and manipulation” under the definition of treatment. (1/13/98)
4. **Can a PT Supervise an Occupational Therapist (OT)?** – The scope of practice for physical therapists does not authorize the physical therapist to clinically supervise an occupational therapist. (9/10/02)
5. **Electronystagmography and Posturography Testing** – It is within the scope of practice for a licensed physical therapist in Hawaii to conduct electronystagmography testing for the purpose of examining and evaluating reflexes and autonomic reaction, movement skills and accuracy (in this case of the eyes), sensation and peripheral nerve integrity. It is also in the scope of practice for a licensed physical therapist in Hawaii to conduct computerized dynamic posturography testing for the purpose of examining and evaluating muscle strength, force, endurance, and tone; joints motion, mobility, and stability, reflexes and automatic reaction; movement skill and accuracy; sensation and perception; peripheral nerve integrity; locomotor skill, stability, and endurance; and/or posture and body mechanics. (9/13/05)
6. **As physical therapists, can we separate when practicing as a physical therapist and as an “ordinary” person?** – Assuming by “ordinary” person you mean someone who is a personal trainer, aerobic instructor or coach that may not require a license to practice that particular profession, if a physical therapist performs within their scope of practice, you are required to comply with the applicable licensing laws and rules. (11/8/05)

7. **Does my physical therapist license prevent me from working in another field?** – To the extent that you're performing work within the scope of practice as a physical therapist, you would be required to obtain a physician's referral to treat a patient pursuant to Hawaii Administrative Rules, 16-110-3(a). Basically, if a physical therapist performs within their scope of practice, they are required to comply with the applicable licensing laws and rules. (1/10/06)

II. Physical Therapy Assistants or PTA's and Other Supportive Personnel

1. **Does a supervising physical therapist need to co-sign temporary licensees' evaluation and treatment plans?** – Since the supervising physical therapist is ultimately responsible for the temporary licensee, it would be in the best interest of the supervisor to be aware of what he/she delegates to the subordinate. (6/1/93)
2. **Can an "aide" perform periodic goniometric measurements on patients under the physical therapy practice act? If yes, does this task require supervision by a licensed physical therapist? What kind of supervision, e.g. same facility, same unit, same room or just by countersigning the task?** – Goniometric is an evaluation method, in which case the involvement of a physical therapist is required. If the task is performed by a nurse aide who is under the direction of a nurse, and is not referring to the service as physical therapy, the involvement of a physical therapist is not required. (4/4/95)
3. **Can a PTA perform sharps debridement?** – No, pursuant to the American Physical Therapy Association's policies and procedures. (7/13/04)
4. **Can a PTA take telephone orders from doctors?** – There is a difference between taking a phone message and taking a phone order and direct communication between a physical therapist and a physician and receiving a phone order is considered part of the initial exam and/or assessment and should be taken by the licensed physical therapist. (5/17/05)

III. Physician Prescription or Order Required

1. **Is a volunteer physical therapist permitted to do a 10-minute massage to the neck and upper back of a person without a referral from a physician, in exchange for a donation for a charitable fundraiser – does this constitute "treatment"?** – Board determined that this situation falls within the definition of "treatment" and would require physician's referral. (9/13/94) *Also, on a side note, even though massage falls under the practice of physical therapy, only licensed massage therapist may advertise "massage".*
2. **Out-of-state prescriptions for physical therapy treatment** – Patients who have been seen by physicians in other jurisdictions and have a prescription, must still be seen by a physician licensed in this State for the purposes of obtaining a prescription for physical therapy services to maintain the medical management of the patient, in cases of emergency there may be difficulty in contacting the out-of-state physician and difficulty in readily verifying licensure status of an out-of-state physician. (3/2/99)

3. **Due to the current law, physical therapists cannot participate in the growing “wellness” industry. Otherwise healthy individuals seeking improvement in general health or sport specific enhancement can access the services of “personal trainers”, “lifestyle consultants” and others possessing much less training than a physical therapist. Would the Board be opposed to physical therapists treating this segment of the population without the referral of a physician?** – Yes, the Board would be opposed to the “treating” of an individual without a referral from a physician. However, a physical therapist can be consulted and can provide preventive services that are not considered restorative or rehabilitative in nature without a physician’s referral. (3/2/99)
4. **Whether a physician prescription is required for training athletes?** – To the extent that you’re performing work within the scope of practice as a physical therapist, you would be required to obtain a physician’s referral to treat a patient pursuant to Hawaii Administrative Rules, 16-110-3(a). (11/08/05)

IV. Advertising

1. **Would I be able to advertise or even mention that I am a physical therapist to my clients whom I am offering athletic training to?** – Pursuant to Hawaii Revised Statutes 461J-2, you must be licensed in order to advertise as a physical therapist. (11/8/05)

V. Miscellaneous

1. **Can the term “sports rehabilitation” be used by practitioners other than physical therapists, such as chiropractors?** – The phrase “sports rehabilitation” can be used by practitioners other than physical therapists. The practice act does not limit the use of this phrase/term exclusively to physical therapists. (9/14/99)