



NCBPTE Updates

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THE NORTH CAROLINA BOARD OF PHYSICAL THERAPY EXAMINERS

PTBoard@NCPTBoard.org



Regulatory Spotlight

Navigating the New Normal: The Impact of COVID-19 on Physical Therapy Regulation **by C. David Edwards, PT, DPT, Board Chair**

As I conclude my second term on the North Carolina Board of Physical Therapy Examiners, I have found myself reflecting on how quickly nearly six years have passed and the unprecedented speed of change necessary to execute the business of the Board.

I was elected to my first term as a Board Member in 2018. Our quarterly Board and various committee meetings were conducted almost exclusively in person. The fellowship and networking were the highlight of the meetings as Board members often arrived the evening before, providing an opportunity to spend some relaxed time prior to conducting the next day's formal business. The Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy Examiners (FSBPT), a national body of state PT Boards, held large scale in-person meetings in cities such as Washington, DC and Arlington, Virginia to discuss current issues and to provide education to member boards from all over the United States and its territories. The stay-at-home mandates changed all this dramatically, but life went on.

Almost overnight, a Governor's Executive Order required North Carolinians to stay at home, necessitating the Board conduct its business differently. Among other modifications, open sessions of board meetings must be available to the public, thus Board IT staff learned to use YouTube livestreaming for public attendance during Board meetings. Prior to March 2020, most of us had never routinely used Zoom or the related virtual meeting platforms, but we quickly learned how invaluable these tools would become to continue our work. We became accustomed to the views of each other's home offices, dens, kitchens, a patio with a great view, and yes, occasionally family members still in their pajamas walking behind the participant on camera. Eventually, we learned about virtual backgrounds and the ability to blur the backgrounds. Again, the Governor's Executive Orders for public protection required the Board office staff quickly transition to working from home. Alternate means of processing applications and issuing licenses occurred; rules were reviewed, scope of practice questions were addressed, and public safety was protected. We became leaner, faster, more creative, and

even more efficient. The team pulled together and re-invented the office and the mechanisms of the function of the Board. Again, life went on.

The COVID-19 pandemic ushered in an era of unprecedented change, disrupting industries and reshaping societal norms. Amidst this global upheaval, the field of physical therapy has not been immune to transformation. Regulatory bodies, including the NCBPTE, have played a crucial role in adapting to the evolving landscape, ensuring patient safety and upholding the highest standards of care. Physical therapy is known as a field where human touch is critical. Suddenly, in many settings, we had to adapt to providing services with computers and cameras and occasionally smart phones. Schools adapted to virtual teaching and therapy delivery platforms. Medicare, Medicaid, and other third-party payor patients were allowed to have alternative delivery methods covered such as virtual or perhaps even phone visits. The Board's role again, is to review rules, position statements, emerging practice questions, complaints, etc. as needed, and to that end, ensure public safety.

Government mandates were issued that relaxed certain licensure regulatory requirements to allow physical therapists and physical therapist assistants to provide services in new ways to meet the needs of patients and clients. Virtual training sessions on how to conduct virtual physical therapy evaluations and treatments were held. There were occasional chuckles in the virtual practice trainings when the virtual patient and virtual physical therapy provider suddenly identified new barriers to this new model of delivery, like who is providing contact guard assist to the patient doing squats at a chair alone in his or her home. Providers had to determine things such as the mechanism for the safe delivery of services, along with how to coach and direct the patient without the benefit of human touch. These things were quite foreign for a hands-on profession, but alas the needs of the public were safely met, and life went on.

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Regulatory Spotlight (continued)

One of the most profound impacts of COVID-19 has been the accelerated pace of innovation in healthcare. The pandemic necessitated the rapid development and adoption of new technologies, such as telehealth, to maintain continuity of care and protect both patients and providers. The NCBPTE has responded proactively to these changes, demonstrating a commitment to fostering innovation while maintaining regulatory oversight. In 2020, governmental and payer policy adoption of temporary guidelines to expand telehealth access allowed physical therapists to provide services remotely under certain conditions. This relaxation of certain guidelines helped to ensure availability of services by qualified professionals to those in populous areas and particularly to those in already underserved rural areas. This flexibility enabled physical therapists to continue serving patients while adhering to public health and safety guidelines.

This surge in innovation has presented both opportunities and challenges for regulatory bodies. There were lively and lengthy discussions around management of technology vs touch, while ensuring public safety. While the pandemic created many difficulties, it opened the doors and minds of providers as well as patients to the benefits of new technology and new ways to deliver physical therapy. Although the pandemic has passed, much of this technology that was implemented and tested by fire has continued. Alas, life went on.

As telehealth and other innovative technologies become increasingly integrated into physical therapy practice, the NCBPTE remains steadfast in its commitment to patient safety. The Board has implemented measures to ensure that telehealth services meet the same ethical, efficacy, and safety standards as in-person care, including requiring physical therapists to maintain appropriate licensure and credentials, adhering to established protocols for patient assessment and treatment, and upholding confidentiality and data privacy safeguards.

The pandemic also accelerated the adoption of technology within regulatory bodies, streamlining processes and enhancing efficiency. The NCBPTE has embraced digital solutions, such as online applications, virtual inspections, along with electronic payments, recordkeeping, and communication, to improve the regulatory experience for both physical therapists and the Board.



C. David Edwards, PT, DPT hails from Smithfield, NC and is co-owner of Kinetic Physical Therapy & Wellness. He holds a B.S. in Business Administration & Marketing from Barton College, and a B.S. in Physical Therapy from East Carolina University. His Doctorate in PT is from Simmons University. A member of the APTA, he has held several leadership positions, including District Secretary, Treasurer, Chair, and Fundraising Chair. He has also served as Chapter President, Chapter Treasurer, and more. He has been an active member of the Pitt County Chamber of Commerce, serving on its Board of Directors and the Issue Committee from 2016-19. He is Vice President of Mercey Ventures, LLC and owner of New Orleans Ventures, LLC. A dedicated animal lover and rescue advocate, he served on the NCSU School of Veterinary Medicine Foundation from 2018-21 and co-founded Beare Garden Animal Rescue, serving as its Vice President. A noted speaker, Dr. Edwards gives informative talks on recognition, reduction, and prevention of both elder abuse and animal abuse to many university and community groups. He also enjoys traveling and painting.

These technological advancements have not only saved time and resources but have also enabled the Board to maintain regulatory oversight during periods of physical distancing and remote work. By leveraging technology, the NCBPTE has demonstrated its ability to adapt and innovate, ensuring that regulatory processes remain effective and responsive in the evolving healthcare landscape.

While the virtual method of conducting the business of the Board was quite successful, we rejoiced at the opportunity to return to in-person meetings. Undoubtedly, the heart of physical therapy is human touch and human connection. Finally, things were back to a new “normal.” Alas, life goes on.

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly transformed the regulatory landscape for physical therapy. While the challenges have been significant, the NCBPTE has emerged as a model for adapting to change, fostering innovation, and upholding patient safety. The Board's commitment to embracing technology and streamlining processes will continue to serve as an asset in navigating the ever-changing healthcare environment.

Through COVID and its aftermath, the Board has stayed strong, developing a Public Protection Task Force to look at new and evolving issues in our diverse field. Processes have been reviewed and enhanced. Our IT systems have been enhanced and the security strengthened. Our staff has evolved and grown to meet the needs of our licensees and the public. The Board emerged stronger, leaner, more technologically advanced, learning that as a team, we could and will continue to meet our purpose. At the end of the day, the role of the NCBPTE is to protect public safety. Through the efforts of many, success was realized with minimal disruption.

In January 2024, I will have completed a six-year run serving the licensees and citizens of North Carolina. I have learned much, met many exceptional people, and created everlasting memories. I will look back fondly at my time serving the Board. Alas, life goes on.

Respectfully submitted.

TO DO: License Renewal

License renewal opened on November 1 and must be completed by Wednesday, January 31, 2024 (5 pm EST).



All NEWLY licensed PTs and PTAs in the current license year (Feb. 1, 2023 - Jan. 31, 2024) must also renew by Wednesday, Jan. 31, 2024 (5 pm EST).

For the first renewal, NO continuing competence reporting is required.

All licensees are encouraged to finish the renewal process by Jan. 15, 2024 to avoid potential issues.

Frequently Asked Questions about Continuing Competence

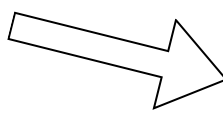
I became a licensed physical therapist in February 2023 after passing the exam in January. I understand that the continuing competence reporting period does not begin until January of 2024 for me; however, I had a question about the Jurisprudence Exercise. Do I need to complete one by January 2024 for renewal?

Since this is your first renewal, you do not have to complete continuing competence activities, including a Jurisprudence Exercise, to renew your license. You will begin recording any activities completed after January 1, 2024 in your continuing competence report. Completing (1) jurisprudence exercise per continuing competence reporting period is the only required continuing competence activity; the other 29 points for PTs and 19 points for PTAs can be a combination of any of the other categories outlined in Board Rule 21 NCAC 48G .0109.

Access to your continuing competence report is available through your personal dashboard on or shortly after each February 1 of the beginning of that respective reporting period (for periods beginning January 1, 2024, reports will be available on or shortly after February 1, 2024).



When you access your Continuing Competence Summary page, you may see the message above. If licensed in the current license year (Feb. 1, 2023 - Jan. 21, 2024), your assigned continuing competence reporting period is Jan. 1, 2024 - Jan. 31, 2026. New licensees begin adding continuing competence activities to their reporting period once the report is made available on or shortly after Feb. 1, 2024. ALL licensees must renew annually, however, a licensee's continuing competence requirements is due every 25 months.



QUESTIONS ABOUT NC PT/PTA LICENSE RENEWAL?

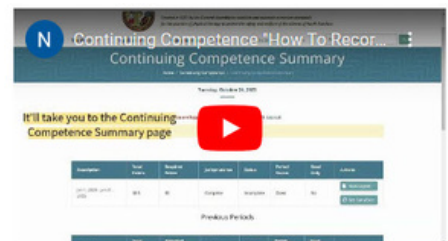
A recording of the November 30, 2023 webinar has been posted to the webinar library and can be accessed through your personal dashboard.

Completion of this webinar AND review of the attached Q/A transcript from the live presentation is required to earn (1) continuing competence point.

For more information or questions email eroeber@ncptboard.org.

Did you know?

Questions about accessing your continuing competence report summary and recording your completed activities are addressed in this short video.



Board office staff hours are 7:30 am – 4 pm, Monday-Friday, to respond to calls and email inquiries. Schedule in-office appointments in advance, Tuesday through Thursday, 10 am – 2 pm by emailing PTBoard@NCPTBoard.org. Provide name, email address, best contact number, and a brief description of appointment needs.