

Position Statement – NC Board of Physical Therapy Examiners

17. Utilization of the Physical Therapist Assistant to Assist the Physical Therapist With Patient Screens

Adopted – July 17, 1997

Reviewed – Sept. 23, 2010, June 17, 2015, June 6, 2018, Sept. 2, 2020, June 8, 2022

Revised to reflect re-codified statutes – April 1, 2019

Revised – June 5, 2024

Position Statement

It is the position of the North Carolina Board of Physical Therapy Examiners that the physical therapist assistant (PTA) is qualified and permitted by the North Carolina Physical Therapy Practice Act to assist the physical therapist (PT) with the performance of patient screens. A physical therapist assistant may not perform screens independently. The following assumptions support this position:

- The physical therapist retains the ultimate responsibility for the provision of physical therapy services.
- The purpose of a screen is to determine if an examination of a patient by a physical therapist is indicated.
- Screens may be either “hands-on” or “hands-off” procedures.
- The physical therapist should only delegate aspects of a patient screen that are appropriate to the assistant’s education, experience, knowledge, and skill according to the guidelines identified herein under: Delegation and Supervision.
- The physical therapist assistant may participate in the collection of data. It is the responsibility of the physical therapist to interpret the data.
- The physical therapist assistant may review the patient medical record to gather information to assist the physical therapist with the screen.
- The physical therapist assistant should **never** make a determination whether the patient needs to be seen by a physical therapist or another healthcare professional.

Definition of Screening¹

Screening is a preliminary process of gathering and integrating information to determine the need for further examination or intervention. Screening is based on a problem-focused, systematic collection and analysis of data to: 1) Identify individuals in need of physical therapy intervention or other health care services, or 2) Ascertain current status of individuals to determine if their condition has improved, deteriorated, or remained unchanged. The 2016 CAPTE standard 7D16 for Patient/Client Management defines screening as follows: Determine when patients/clients need further examination or consultation by a physical therapist or referral to another health care professional

Support Statement

Physical therapist assistants are permitted by North Carolina law to assist the physical therapist with the performance of patient screens. According to the definition of the physical therapist assistant in the North Carolina Physical Therapy Practice Act (GS 90-270-90. 3), “Physical therapist assistant means any person who assists in the practice of physical therapy in accordance with the provisions of this Article, and who works under the supervision of a physical therapist by performing such patient-related activities assigned by a physical therapist which are commensurate with the physical therapist assistant’s education and training, but an assistant’s work shall not include the interpretation and implementation of referrals from licensed medical doctors or dentists, the performance of evaluations, or the determination or major modification of treatment programs.”² **Therefore, the physical therapist assistant is not allowed to**

¹Based on the American Physical Therapy Association: A Guide to Physical Therapist Practice, Volume 1: A Description of Patient Management, 1995.

²North Carolina Physical Therapy Practice Act (GS 90-270.90 - 90-270.106).

independently screen patients and decide which patients will be reviewed by the physical therapist.

Physical therapist assistants are qualified to assist the physical therapist with the performance of patient screens. They have completed a program of education accredited by the Commission of Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE).³ CAPTE has established curricular standards for physical therapist assistant education which include content areas directly related to patient assessment and measurement.

Section 50 7D24 of the CAPTE Standard requires a licensee to demonstrate competence of data collection skills essential for carrying out the plan of care by administering appropriate tests and measures (before, during and after interventions) for the following areas:

- a. Aerobic Capacity and Endurance:
- b. Anthropometrical Characteristics:
- c. Mental Functions:
- d. Assistive Technology:
- e. Gait, Locomotion, and Balance:
- f. Integumentary Integrity:
- g. Joint Integrity and Mobility:
- h. Muscle Performance:
- i. Neuromotor Development:
- j. Pain:
- k. Posture:
- l. Range of Motion:
- m. Self-Care and Civic,
- n. Ventilation, Respiration and Circulation:

Delegation and Supervision

Knowledge of the scope of a physical therapist assistant's qualifications for assisting in the provision of physical therapy treatment enhances the physical therapist's ability to appropriately delegate screening activity. The physical therapist assistant's experience, participation in continuing education courses, and education in other areas, should be considered by the physical therapist when delegating screening duties to the physical therapist assistant.⁴ Physical therapists should only delegate measurement procedures that are commensurate with the physical therapist assistant's education and training.

Ultimately, decisions about delegation must be based on the requirements defined by the North Carolina Practice Act and by concerns for the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of North Carolina.

Recommendations:

- The physical therapist shall define the physical therapist assistant's participation in the screening of each patient within the parameters specified in this Position Statement.
- If the physical therapist assistant is assigned screening duties, then there must be interaction between the supervising physical therapist and the physical therapist assistant.
- The physical therapist will interpret the data compiled from the screen and make the appropriate recommendation for physical therapy or additional services based on the results of the screen.
- Individuals participating in the screen should document which aspect of the screen they performed.

³Commission on Accreditation of Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE: Evaluative Criteria for Accreditation of Education Programs for the Physical Therapist Assistant, 2016.

⁴APTA Section on Pediatrics - Utilization of Physical Therapist Assistants in the Provision of Pediatric Physical Therapy.

