

Position Statement – NC Board of Physical Therapy Examiners

3. Direct Access

Posted – December 17, 2001

Revised – September 23, 2010 (Sentence added below), June 17, 2015

Reviewed- June 6, 2018, September 2, 2020, June 8, 2022

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

Revised to reflect change to the NC PT Practice Act – effective 10-01-19

Question: Does North Carolina allow direct access (practice without the legal requirement of a physician’s referral) and where can I find it in the NC PT Practice Act?

Answer: North Carolina has had direct access since 1985 when the Practice Act was revised by the NC General Assembly.

G.S. 90-270.90-90-270.106

PHYSICAL THERAPY PRACTICE ACT: NORTH CAROLINA

Effective: December 30, 1985

Article 18E Physical Therapy

90-270.90. Definitions.--In this Article, unless the context otherwise requires, the following definitions shall apply:

Prior to 10-01-19

(4) "Physical therapy".....“Physical therapy does not include the application of roentgen rays or radioactive materials, surgery, manipulation of the spine unless prescribed by a physician licensed to practice medicine in North Carolina, or medical diagnosis of disease.”

***NEW!* On and after 10-01-19**

(4) “Physical therapy”” Physical therapy does not include the application of roentgen rays or radioactive materials, surgery, the practice of chiropractic, as defined by G.S. 90-143, or medical diagnosis of disease.”

90-270.102. Unlawful practice. - Except as otherwise authorized in this act, if any person, firm, or corporation shall:

(4) Practice physical therapy and fail to refer to a licensed medical doctor or dentist any patient whose medical condition should have, at the time of evaluation or treatment, been determined to be beyond the scope of practice of a physical therapist;

SENTENCE ADDED (September 23, 2010)

Therefore, a referral from anyone (including a chiropractor or podiatrist) who is not a licensed medical doctor or dentist is the same as direct access.

Kathy Arney, PT, MA, Executive Director
NC Board of Physical Therapy Examiners
8300 Health Park Suite 233
Raleigh, NC 27615
Phone: 1-919-490-6393 / 800-800-8982
Fax: 1-919-490-5106
Email: karney@ncptboard.org
Web: www.ncptboard.org