

## **VIRGINIA BOARD OF PHYSICAL THERAPY**

### **Physical Therapy Services in Home Health**

In response to requests for interpretation related to the provision of physical therapy services in the home health setting, the Board has adopted the following guidance:

#### **Unlicensed Aides in a Home Health Setting**

Regarding use of unlicensed aides to provide therapy services in a home health setting, the Board cited 18 VAC 112-20-100 (A) and (B) and emphasized the physical therapist's and physical therapist assistant's responsibilities in providing supervision:

*A. A physical therapist shall be fully responsible for any action of persons performing physical therapy functions under the physical therapist's supervision or direction.*

*B. Support personnel shall only perform routine assigned tasks under the direct supervision of a licensed physical therapist or a licensed physical therapist assistant, who shall only assign those tasks or activities that are nondiscretionary and do not require the exercise of professional judgment.*

The Board further referred to the definition of direct supervision in 18 VAC 112-20-10:

*"Direct supervision" means a physical therapist or a physical therapist assistant is physically present and immediately available and is fully responsible for the physical therapy tasks or activities being performed.*

and to the responsibilities to patients in 18 VAC 112-20-120 (A-C), which states:

*A. The initial patient visit shall be made by the physical therapist for evaluation of the patient and establishment of a plan of care.*

*B. The physical therapist assistant's first visit with the patient shall only be made after verbal or written communication with the physical therapist regarding patient status and plan of care. Documentation of such communication shall be made in the patient's record.*

*C. Documentation of physical therapy interventions shall be recorded on a patient's record by the physical therapist or physical therapist assistant providing the care.*

#### **Scope of Practice**

Regarding whether the scope of practice of physical therapy changes in a home health setting

environment, the Board cited Virginia Code § 54.1-3473, defining the “practice of physical therapy” which does not change or alter with different practice settings:

*"Practice of physical therapy" means that branch of the healing arts that is concerned with, upon medical referral and direction, the evaluation, testing, treatment, reeducation and rehabilitation by physical, mechanical or electronic measures and procedures of individuals who, because of trauma, disease or birth defect, present physical and emotional disorders. The practice of physical therapy also includes the administration, interpretation, documentation, and evaluation of tests and measurements of bodily functions and structures within the scope of practice of the physical therapist. However, the practice of physical therapy does not include the medical diagnosis of disease or injury, the use of Roentgen rays and radium for diagnostic or therapeutic purposes or the use of electricity for shock therapy and surgical purposes including cauterization.*

### **Invasive Procedures**

Regarding the performance of invasive procedures in the home health setting, the Board referred to Virginia Code § 54.1-3482(D), which states:

*D. Invasive procedures within the scope of practice of physical therapy shall at all times be performed only under the referral and direction of a licensed doctor of medicine, osteopathy, chiropractic, podiatry, or dental surgery, a licensed nurse practitioner practicing in accordance with his practice agreement, or a licensed physician assistant acting under the supervision of a licensed physician.*

The Board further referred to the responsibility of a practitioner as outlined in 18VAC112-20-180(A)(1-2):

*A. A practitioner shall not:*

*1. Perform procedures or techniques that are outside the scope of his practice or for which he is not trained and individually competent;*

*2. Knowingly allow persons under his supervision to jeopardize patient safety or provide patient care outside of such person's scope of practice or area of responsibility. Practitioners shall delegate patient care only to persons who are properly trained and supervised.*