

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5473

AS OF FEBRUARY 25, 1993

Brief Description: Requiring licensure of physical therapist assistants.

SPONSORS: Senators Prentice, Deccio, Rinehart and Sellar

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Staff: Scott Plack (786-7409)

Hearing Dates: March 3, 1993

BACKGROUND:

The Physical Therapy Practice Act authorizes the unregulated practice of minor physical therapy services by physical therapy aides. It further requires that physical therapy aides be under the direct supervision of a licensed physical therapist while performing these services. The Board of Physical Therapy has used this authority to allow the use of physical therapy assistants. It has adopted administrative rules concerning the practice of physical therapy assistants, including specific provisions for supervision of assistants by licensed physical therapists. The supervising physical therapist is held responsible for the conduct of the physical therapy assistant while that person performs physical therapy services.

The Washington State Physical Therapy Association requested that the Legislature initiate a "sunrise" review to consider a proposal to license physical therapy assistants. They argued for licensure because unregulated professions, such as physical therapy assistants, are not directly subject to the state's Uniform Disciplinary Act.

The Department of Health and the State Board of Health conducted the review and recommended that licensure of the profession was not necessary. They argued that the current Physical Therapy Practice Act provides adequate provisions for oversight and accountability of the physical therapy assistants.

SUMMARY:

The Physical Therapy Practice Act is amended to license physical therapy assistants. Education requirements are established. Physical therapy assistants are permitted to practice under the indirect supervision of a licensed physical therapist and "indirect supervision" is defined.

The Board of Physical Therapy is expanded from five to seven members. An additional physical therapist and a physical therapy assistant are added as members. The physical therapy assistant member on the board may only vote on matters affecting physical therapists. When making board appointments the Governor should assure that its members adequately reflect the different practice settings, physical therapy specialties, geographic regions and diverse ethnic heritage of the members of the profession.

The board is authorized to adopt rules governing the practice of physical therapy assistants. Applicants for licensure must be of good moral character and have completed a board-approved education program. The board is directed to require a competency examination for each applicant for licensure. Applicants who fail an examination may retake it. The Secretary of Health is directed to issue a license to any applicant who successfully passes the examination. Licensure by endorsement is permitted for applicants licensed in other states that have substantially equivalent regulatory standards.

The use of the terms or titles "physical therapy assistant," "physical therapists assistant," "physical therapy technician," "physiotherapy assistant," "P.T.A.," "L.P.T.A." are restricted to licensed persons. The board is required to license all physical therapy assistants without requiring a competency examination if such persons are practicing prior to the enactment date of the legislation.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: available