
**Health Care & Wellness
Committee**

ESSB 5292

Brief Description: Requiring the licensing of physical therapist assistants.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Fairley, Roach, Kohl-Welles, Keiser and Parlette).

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Establishes physical therapist assistants as a health profession licensed by the Secretary of Health.
- Establishes supervisory requirements for physical therapists.

Hearing Date: 3/26/07

Staff: Chris Blake (786-7392).

Background:

Physical therapists are licensed by the Secretary of Health (Secretary) to examine, evaluate, and test individuals with mechanical, physiological, and functional impairments. They are licensed to use a variety of therapeutic interventions to alleviate these impairments. Some examples are the design of therapeutic exercise, massage, or training relating to posture or movement. Physical therapists must pass an exam administered by the Board of Physical Therapy (Board) in order to receive a license.

Physical therapists may rely on the assistance of two categories of supportive personnel. Physical therapist assistants are providers who have completed an education program and practice under either the direct or indirect supervision of a physical therapist. Physical therapy aides are individuals who provide assistance with patient care obtained through on-the-job training and may only practice under the direct supervision of a physical therapist. In addition, other assistive personnel who are properly trained to perform specific tasks related to physical therapy, such as massage therapists, athletic trainers, and exercise physiologists, may assist a physical therapist. A

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physical therapy practice may not have more than twice as many physical therapist assistants and physical therapy aides as there are physical therapists.

Summary of Bill:

Physical therapist assistants are created as a new profession to be licensed by the Secretary. An applicant for a physical therapist assistant license must be of good moral character, have completed a physical therapist assistant program approved by the Board, and pass an examination. The examination requirement shall be waived for applicants who meet commonly accepted standards for practicing as a physical therapist assistant and apply for a license within a year of the effective date of the act. In addition, an applicant may receive a license without taking the examination if the applicant is licensed in a state with qualifications substantially equivalent to those of Washington.

Physical therapist assistants may perform physical therapy procedures and related tasks that have been selected and delegated by a supervising physical therapist. Physical therapists may not delegate sharp debridement to a physical therapist assistant. Only a physical therapist may: interpret referrals; conduct initial and follow up examinations and provide diagnoses for physical therapy; develop plans of care and reevaluate them; determine which tasks may be delegated; check the qualifications of assistive personnel to perform assigned tasks; delegate and instruct personnel regarding services to be performed by them; and establish a discharge plan.

Physical therapists are responsible for patient care provided by the assistive personnel that they supervise. A physical therapist's supervisory responsibilities include conducting a patient reevaluation every fifth visit or when there are certain unexpected changes in the patient's condition. Physical therapists may not supervise more than two assistive personnel at a time. Failure to properly supervise may result in disciplinary action against the supervising physical therapist.

There are exemptions from licensure as a physical therapist assistant for those who are practicing while employed by the federal government, temporarily in Washington as part of an educational program, or pursuing clinical experience requirements in a physical therapist assistant education program under the direct supervision of a licensed physical therapist.

The membership of the Board is expanded to six members by adding a physical therapist assistant with at least five years of practice in physical therapy.

Health carriers are not required to contract with licensed physical therapist assistants.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on March 22, 2007.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on July 1, 2008, except section 2 relating to membership on the Board of Physical Therapy which takes effect on December 1, 2008.