
Health Care & Wellness Committee

SSB 6445

Brief Description: Clarifying the role of physician assistants in the delivery of mental health services.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Health Care (originally sponsored by Senators Braun and Angel).

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Includes physician assistants among other mental health professionals that have authority or duties concerning mental health treatment.
- Allows physician assistants to provide services that are consistent with their delegation agreement with a supervising physician and to practice in any area of medicine or surgery as long as the practice is not beyond the supervising physician's scope of expertise and practice.

Hearing Date: 2/24/16

Staff: Ariele Landstrom (786-7190).

Background:

"Physician assistant" is defined as a person who is licensed by the Medical Quality Assurance Commission to practice medicine to a limited extent only under the supervision of a physician and who is academically and clinically prepared to provide health care services and perform diagnostic, therapeutic, preventative, and health maintenance services. "Osteopathic physician assistant" is defined as a person who has satisfactorily completed a training program, approved by the Board of Osteopathic Medicine and Surgery, designed to prepare persons to practice osteopathic medicine to a limited extent. Physician assistants or osteopathic physician assistants may not perform health care services in areas related to vision, dentistry or dental hygiene, chiropractic, or podiatric medicine or surgery.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Throughout many mental health provisions of the Revised Code of Washington and administrative rules, physician assistants and osteopathic physician assistants are not specified as mental health professionals given authority or required to perform certain duties related to mental health treatment. Physician assistants may assist a licensed physician to examine and evaluate persons involuntarily detained and accepted or admitted at an evaluation and treatment facility.

Summary of Bill:

Physician assistants and osteopathic physician assistants are included among other mental health professionals that have authority or duties in the following areas of mental health treatment:

- involuntary detainment or commitment and involuntary treatment;
- privileged communications;
- examination of persons charged with sexual psychopathy;
- data on mental health professionals in private establishments;
- determination of capacity for the purposes of mental health advance directives; and
- mental health services for minors.

Physician assistants and osteopathic physician assistants may provide services that they are competent to perform based on their education, training, and experience and that are consistent with their delegation agreement with a supervising physician. The supervising physician and the physician assistant must determine which procedures may be performed and the degree of supervision under which the procedure is performed. Physician assistants may practice in any area of medicine or surgery as long as the practice is not beyond the supervising physician's own scope of expertise and practice.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 22, 2016.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed, except for sections 7 and 12, which take effect April 1, 2016.