



American Physical Therapy Association - Tennessee Chapter

Position Statement on Wellness Utilized in Outpatient Physical Therapy Clinics

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) - Tennessee Chapter is committed to promoting the health and well-being of all Tennesseans through high-quality physical therapy services. This position statement outlines the distinctions between wellness services for individuals under a current Plan of Care for physical therapy services and those seeking direct access to wellness services, as guided by the Tennessee Physical Therapy Practice Act and relevant regulations.

As described in the Tennessee Physical Therapy Practice Act:

- “A licensed physical therapist may provide physical assessments or instructions, including a recommendation of exercise to an asymptomatic person, without the referral of a referring practitioner.”

1. Wellness Services for Current Patients

When a patient with a current Plan of Care transitions to wellness services, they must be formally discharged from skilled physical therapy treatment and converted to a wellness-only client. Within this context:

- Physical therapists can provide non-skilled services aimed at general health and well-being, such as activity guidance, fitness programs, and health advice.
- These services are **not billable to insurance payers** and must be offered on a cash-based model.
- The services provided under “wellness” are distinct from skilled physical therapy interventions, which involve the treatment of functional deficits and require a formal Plan of Care.

2. Direct Access Clients

For individuals seeking direct access to wellness services via a physical therapist:

- Physical therapists can provide exercise and health advice without needing a referral from a healthcare provider. These wellness services should focus on general health promotion and physical fitness.
- Skilled physical therapy services cannot be provided unless a functional deficit is identified and a physical therapy evaluation is conducted, resulting in an established Plan of Care. (examples listed here but not limited to: therapeutic exercise, manual therapy, therapeutic activity, gait training, dry needling, laser, etc.)

Legal Compliance

Physical therapists in Tennessee must adhere to the Tennessee Physical Therapy Practice Act and the associated Rules and Regulations. This includes:

- Ensuring wellness services are clearly defined and separate from skilled physical therapy interventions as outlined above.
- Operating within the legal framework for direct access, which includes specific criteria for providing services without a referral as defined by the Tennessee Physical Therapy Practice Act and clarified in the Rules and Regulations.
- Maintaining transparency with clients about the nature of wellness services, the cost of these services, and the implications for insurance reimbursement.

By following these guidelines, physical therapists can provide effective wellness services while maintaining compliance with state laws and regulations, fostering a healthier community in Tennessee.