

CHAPTER 148A
PHYSICAL THERAPY

Referred to in §135.24, 135.61, 147.74, 147.76, 321.34, 321L.2, 481A.38, 514C.30, 714H.4

Enforcement, §147.87, 147.92
Penalty, §147.86

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148A.1 Definitions — referral — authorization.

- 1. As used in this chapter:
a. "Board" means the board of physical and occupational therapy created under chapter 147.

b. "Physical therapy" means the branch of science that deals with the evaluation and treatment of human capabilities and impairments. Physical therapy uses the effective properties of physical agents including but not limited to mechanical devices, heat, cold, air, light, water, electricity, and sound, and therapeutic exercises, and rehabilitative procedures to prevent, correct, minimize, or alleviate a physical impairment.

(1) Physical therapy includes the interpretation of performances, tests, and measurements, the establishment and modification of physical therapy programs, treatment planning, consultative services, instructions to the patients, and the administration and supervision attendant to physical therapy facilities.

(2) Physical therapy permits the referral of a patient by a physical therapist for diagnostic imaging, including plain radiographs and magnetic resonance imaging, provided the diagnostic imaging is performed and the results are interpreted by an appropriately licensed and qualified health care professional. The physical therapist who ordered the diagnostic imaging shall report the results of the diagnostic imaging to the patient's designated primary care provider within seven days following receipt of the results to ensure patient coordination of care, unless the patient does not have a designated primary care provider or the health care professional who performed and interpreted the diagnostic imaging previously provided the results to the primary care provider.

2. Physical therapy evaluation and treatment may be rendered by a physical therapist with or without a referral from a physician, podiatric physician, dentist, or chiropractor, except that a hospital may require that physical therapy evaluation and treatment provided in the hospital shall be done only upon prior review by and authorization of a member of the hospital's medical staff.

[C66, 71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, §148A.1]

84 Acts, ch 1268, §1; 86 Acts, ch 1238, §7; 87 Acts, ch 65, §3; 88 Acts, ch 1002, §1; 95 Acts, ch 108, §8; 2007 Acts, ch 10, §99; 2023 Acts, ch 122, §1

Referred to in §148A.3

148A.2 Who engaged in practice.

For the purpose of this chapter the following classes of persons shall be deemed to be engaged in the practice of physical therapy:

- 1. Persons who treat human ailments by physical therapy as defined in this chapter.
2. Persons who publicly profess to be physical therapists or who publicly profess to perform the functions incident to the practice of physical therapy.

[C66, 71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, §148A.2]

148A.3 Persons not included.

Section 148A.1 shall not be construed to include the following classes of persons:

- 1. Licensed physicians and surgeons, osteopathic physicians and surgeons, podiatric physicians, chiropractors, nurses, dentists, cosmetologists, and barbers, who are engaged in the practice of their respective professions.

2. Students of physical therapy who practice physical therapy under the supervision of a licensed physical therapist in connection with the regular course of instruction at a school of physical therapy.

3. Physical therapists of the United States army, navy, or public health service, or physical therapists licensed in another state, when incidentally called into this state in consultation with a physician and surgeon or physical therapists licensed in this state.

4. Nonprofessional workers not held out as physical therapists who are employed in hospitals, clinics, offices or health care facilities as defined in [section 135C.1](#) working under the supervision and direction of a physical therapist or physician licensed pursuant to [chapter 148](#).

5. Massage therapists, massage technicians, masseurs and masseuses who administer body massage by Swedish or other massage technique, including modalities, in a massage establishment, health club, athletic club or school athletic department, but in no instance shall they designate themselves as physical therapists.

[C66, 71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, §148A.3]

[84 Acts, ch 1268, §2](#); [96 Acts, ch 1034, §68](#); [2008 Acts, ch 1088, §100](#)

148A.4 Requirements to practice.

Each applicant for a license to practice physical therapy shall:

1. Complete a course of study in, and hold a diploma or certificate issued by, a school of physical therapy accredited by the American physical therapy association or another appropriate accrediting body, and meet requirements as established by rules of the board.

2. Have passed an examination administered by the board.

[C66, 71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, §148A.4]

[83 Acts, ch 101, §27](#); [84 Acts, ch 1268, §3](#); [2007 Acts, ch 10, §100](#)

148A.5 Limitations.

A license to practice physical therapy does not authorize the licensee to practice operative surgery or osteopathic or chiropractic manipulation, or to administer or prescribe any drug or medicine included in materia medica.

[88 Acts, ch 1002, §2](#)

148A.6 Physical therapist assistant.

1. A licensed physical therapist assistant is required to function under the direction and supervision of a licensed physical therapist to perform physical therapy procedures delegated and supervised by the licensed physical therapist in a manner consistent with the rules adopted by the board. Selected and delegated tasks of physical therapist assistants may include but are not limited to therapeutic procedures and related tasks, routine operational functions, documentation of treatment progress, and the use of selected physical agents. The ability of the licensed physical therapist assistant to perform the selected and delegated tasks shall be assessed on an ongoing basis by the supervising physical therapist. The licensed physical therapist assistant shall not interpret referrals, perform initial evaluation or reevaluations, initiate physical therapy treatment programs, change specified treatment programs, or discharge a patient from physical therapy services.

2. Each applicant for a license to practice as a physical therapist assistant shall:

a. Successfully complete a course of study for the physical therapist assistant accredited by the commission on accreditation in education of the American physical therapy association, or another appropriate accrediting body, and meet other requirements established by the rules of the board.

b. Have passed an examination administered by the board.

3. [This section](#) does not prevent a person not licensed as a physical therapist assistant from performing services ordinarily performed by a physical therapy aide, assistant, or technician, provided that the person does not represent to the public that the person is a licensed physical therapist assistant, or use the title “physical therapist assistant” or the letters

“P.T.A.”, and provided that the person performs services consistent with the supervision requirements of the board for persons not licensed as physical therapist assistants.

[91 Acts, ch 228, §3](#); [2000 Acts, ch 1140, §33](#); [2004 Acts, ch 1068, §2](#); [2007 Acts, ch 10, §101](#)

148A.7 False use of titles prohibited.

1. A person or business entity, including the employees, agents, or representatives of the business entity, shall not use in connection with that person’s or business entity’s business activity the words “physical therapy”, “physical therapist”, “licensed physical therapist”, “registered physical therapist”, “doctor of physical therapy”, “physical therapist assistant”, “licensed physical therapist assistant”, “registered physical therapist assistant”, or the letters “P. T.”, “L. P. T.”, “R. P. T.”, “D. P. T.”, “P. T. A.”, “L. P. T. A.”, “R. P. T. A.”, or any other words, abbreviations, or insignia indicating or implying that physical therapy is provided or supplied, unless such services are provided by or under the direction and supervision of a physical therapist licensed pursuant to [this chapter](#).

2. Notwithstanding [section 147.74](#), a person or the owner, officer, or agent of an entity that violates [this section](#) is guilty of a serious misdemeanor, and a license to practice shall be revoked or suspended pursuant to [section 147.55](#).

3. [This section](#) shall not apply to the use of the term “physiotherapy” by a provider licensed under [this chapter](#), [chapter 151](#), or by an individual under the direction and supervision of a provider licensed under [this chapter](#) or [chapter 151](#).

[2004 Acts, ch 1068, §1](#); [2009 Acts, ch 133, §56](#)