



January 4, 2012

Justin Elliott  
American Physical Therapy Association  
Director of State Government Affairs  
1111 North Fairfax Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Mr. Elliott:

**RE: Physical Therapists performing spinal manipulation**

The Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (FSBPT) is the member organization for the 53 physical therapy licensing jurisdictions in the United States. The mission of the FSBPT is to protect the public by providing service and leadership that promote safe and competent physical therapy practice. Two of the services the Federation provides for its members are the development of the National Physical Therapy Examination (NPTE) and administration and maintenance of the Examination, Licensure, and Disciplinary Database (ELDD).

The development of the exam is based on rigorous psychometric standards and its content covers current entry-level practice. As such, the contents of the examination are determined by an analysis of practice that is conducted at least every five years. Through an extensive study, the analysis of practice determines what activities are being performed by entry-level practitioners. It also determines the knowledges required to perform these activities. The most recent analysis of practice was concluded in 2011.

Apparently there has been some question regarding the content of the NPTE, specifically if the content of the exam includes the knowledge and skill required to perform mobilization/ manipulation (thrust/non-thrust). The content outline for the NPTE was revised based on the 2006 analysis of practice and the forms of the NPTE released on and after March 1, 2008 are based on this content outline. In the 2006 analysis of practice study, the activities identified as being performed by entry-level physical therapists include:

*Procedural Interventions: Manual Therapy Techniques*

- Perform soft tissue mobilization (e.g., connective tissue massage, therapeutic massage)
- Perform manual traction
- Perform spinal mobilization/manipulation (Grades 1-5)
- Perform peripheral mobilization/manipulation (Grades 1-5)

In the 2011 analysis of practice study, the work activities identified as being performed by entry-level physical therapists include:

*Manual Therapy Techniques*

- Perform peripheral mobilization /manipulation (thrust/non-thrust)
- Perform spinal mobilization (non-thrust)
- Perform cervical spinal manipulation (thrust)
- Perform thoracic and lumbar spinal manipulation (thrust)

The 2011 analysis of practice is consistent with the 2006 study with regards to manipulation. Because spinal and peripheral mobilization/manipulation (thrust/non-thrust) were determined to be important activities that are

being performed by entry-level licensed physical therapists, the NPTE content includes questions specifically related to the knowledge and skills needed to perform these activities. Passage of the NPTE by a uniform passing score is required by all 53 jurisdictions for licensure as a physical therapist.

To support its mission of public protection, the Federation administers and maintains the Examination, Licensure, and Disciplinary Database. FSBPT regularly independently searches out public records and databases, and corresponds with and receives reports of disciplinary action from many of the member jurisdictions to maintain the most complete data base of disciplinary actions against licensed PTs and PTAs possible. The main purpose of the FSBPT ELDD is to serve as an alert mechanism for physical therapy licensing boards. When a licensee holds multiple licenses and has been disciplined in one jurisdiction, if the FSBPT is alerted, then the ELDD will alert the other jurisdictions in which the licensee is licensed.

The Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy's Examination, Licensure, and Disciplinary Database contains two entries in all jurisdictions of discipline for manipulation performed by physical therapists. Neither instance describes any harm to the patient, but are for 1) performing manipulation without the patient's consent and 2) performing manipulations beyond the order of the physician. Admittedly, the information in the ELDD is not complete. There are barriers in some of the jurisdictions to allow them to report to the Federation. Thus, not every disciplinary action against physical therapists and physical therapist assistants is contained in the ELDD.

Should you have any further question related to the content of the NPTE and its development, or the ELDD, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Leslie Adrian, PT, MS, MPA  
Director of Professional Standards  
Federation of State Board of Physical Therapy