



HB 1673/SB 5549

Facts About Physical Therapists Performing Spinal Manipulation

The facts speak for themselves.

New Since the 2011 Legislative Session

In an effort to alleviate continued concerns about adequate education and training, as well as patient safety, on the part of other stakeholder groups:

- PTWA, in collaboration with the American Physical Therapy Association, proposed adding restrictions including advanced certification and an endorsement by the Washington State Board of Physical Therapy to our bill.
- APTA contacted the major malpractice insurer for physical therapists in the US (CNA/HPSO) about the risk associated with physical therapists performing spinal manipulation. Using data from 1992 to present, CNA/HPSO responded that there are no indications that spinal manipulation performed by physical therapists presents a risk factor. (See accompanying letter.)
- APTA also contacted the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (FSBPT) about disciplinary trends against physical therapists performing spinal manipulation. (See accompanying letter.)

Not New but Worth Repeating

- The National Physical Therapy Exam (NPTE) administered by the FSBPT requires candidates in all 53 jurisdictions, including Washington state, to demonstrate spinal manipulation proficiency in order to pass the exam. Candidates who do not demonstrate this proficiency do not pass the test and do not get a license to practice in Washington or any other state.
- Students receiving their Doctorate of Physical Therapy from any of the schools in Washington state (University of Washington, Eastern Washington University and University of Puget Sound) must demonstrate proficiency in spinal manipulation to graduate.
- Washington state and Arkansas are the only two states that prohibit a PT from performing spinal manipulation when a patient needs it.
- Patients who need this treatment receive it as part of a physical therapy plan of care that includes other treatments. So they must see two practitioners in order to receive full treatment in Washington – unless they're being treated in a federal facility such as a VA hospital or a military base where it is legal for physical therapists to perform spinal manipulation, even in Washington state.
- In a 1999 Sunrise Review by the Washington State Department of Health, the Department recommended allowing physical therapists to perform spinal manipulation.