**BOARD OF PHYSICAL THERAPY**

**Physical Therapists in Public Schools and Direct Access**

The Board periodically receives questions regarding physical therapists in the school setting and the provisions related to direct access. The Board refers to the direct access provisions of Virginia Code § 54.1-3482 (B) and (C), which state as follows:

*B. A physical therapist who has completed a doctor of physical therapy program approved by the Commission on Accreditation of Physical Therapy Education or who has obtained a certificate of authorization pursuant to § 54.1-3482.1 may evaluate and treat a patient for no more than 60 consecutive days after an initial evaluation without a referral under the following conditions: (i) the patient is not receiving care from any licensed doctor of medicine, osteopathy, chiropractic, podiatry, or dental surgery, a licensed nurse practitioner practicing in accordance with his practice agreement, or a licensed physician assistant acting under the supervision of a licensed physician for the symptoms giving rise to the presentation at the time of the presentation to the physical therapist for physical therapy services or (ii) the patient is receiving care from a licensed doctor of medicine, osteopathy, chiropractic, podiatry, or dental surgery, a licensed nurse practitioner practicing in accordance with his practice agreement, or a licensed physician assistant acting under the supervision of a licensed physician at the time of his presentation to the physical therapist for the symptoms giving rise to the presentation for physical therapy services and (a) the patient identifies a licensed doctor of medicine, osteopathy, chiropractic, podiatry, or dental surgery, a licensed nurse practitioner practicing in accordance with his practice agreement, or a licensed physician assistant acting under the supervision of a licensed physician from whom he is currently receiving care; (b) the patient gives written consent for the physical therapist to release all personal health information and treatment records to the identified practitioner; and (c) the physical therapist notifies the practitioner identified by the patient no later than 14 days after treatment commences and provides the practitioner with a copy of the initial evaluation along with a copy of the patient history obtained by the physical therapist. Treatment for more than 60 consecutive days after evaluation of such patient shall only be upon the referral and direction of a licensed doctor of medicine, osteopathy, chiropractic, podiatry, or dental surgery, a licensed nurse practitioner practicing in accordance with his practice agreement, or a licensed physician assistant acting under the supervision of a licensed physician. A physical therapist may contact the practitioner identified by the patient at the end of the 60-day period to determine if the practitioner will authorize additional physical therapy services until such time as the patient can be seen by the practitioner. After discharging a patient, a physical therapist shall not perform an initial evaluation of a patient under this subsection without a referral if the physical therapist has performed an initial evaluation of the patient under this subsection for the same condition within the immediately preceding 60 days.*

*C. A physical therapist who has not completed a doctor of physical therapy program approved by the Commission on Accreditation of Physical Therapy Education or who has not obtained a certificate of authorization pursuant to § 54.1-3482.1 may conduct a one-time evaluation that does not include treatment of a patient without the referral and direction of a licensed doctor of medicine, osteopathy, chiropractic, podiatry, or dental surgery, a licensed nurse practitioner practicing in accordance with his practice agreement, or a licensed physician assistant acting under the supervision of a licensed physician; if appropriate, the physical therapist shall immediately refer such patient to the appropriate practitioner.*

The direct access provisions apply regardless of the setting of the physical therapist, including the school setting. The direct access provisions are not limited by the nature of the services or evaluation, for example, whether the student is to be considered for or receive services pursuant to an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 Plan.

The Board notes that Virginia Code § 54.1-3482(G) relates to the provision of physical therapy services without referral or supervision. The language in subsection (G)(iii) refers only to students with IEP plans:

*G. However, a licensed physical therapist may provide, without referral or supervision, physical therapy services to … (iii) special education students who, by virtue of their individualized education plans (IEPs), need physical therapy services to fulfill the provisions of their IEPs…*