

Position Statement on Physical Therapy Aides Performing Designated Unskilled Tasks

The Montana Board of Physical Therapy Examiners has been asked to further clarify the unskilled tasks that may be designated to a physical therapy aide under the new rules set forth in **ARM 24.177.405**. Section 2 of ARM 24.177.405 states that “A physical therapy aide is limited to performing the following patient supportive tasks under the direct supervision of a physical therapist or physical therapist assistant”

- (a) Preparing a patient for treatment by a physical therapist or physical therapist assistant;
- (b) Providing unskilled aid to a patient after treatment by a physical therapist or physical therapist assistant; and
- (c) Assisting a physical therapist or physical therapist assistant when safety or patient care requires a second person’s assistance.

An example of “unskilled aid to a patient after treatment by a physical therapist or physical therapist assistant” (Section 2 (b)) might be removing a hot or cold pack, or removing electrodes and cleaning the gel from a patient after *routine* treatment if, in the professional judgment of the physical therapist or physical therapist assistant, the patient would not need to have the physical therapist or physical therapist assistant examine the patient again at the end of treatment, as would be necessary, for example, if the patient were diabetic or had a condition requiring professional examination of the skin, circulation, etc. New Section 2 was not meant to be all inclusive, or exclusive, of other situations in which a physical therapy aide might perform patient supportive tasks so long as the supervising physical therapist or physical therapist assistant used his or her professional judgment to determine if the task being designated was unskilled. A physical therapist aide cannot perform direct patient care treatment even if the aide is directly supervised. Only licensed physical therapists and licensed physical therapist assistants can perform direct patient care and treatments.

Section 3 of ARM 24.177.405 states that a physical therapist aide can perform *nonpatient* care tasks without direct or onsite supervision such as:

- (a) Housekeeping activities including caring for and stocking equipment and supplies;
- (b) Transporting patients, records, equipment and supplies in accordance with established policies and procedures;
- (c) Assembling and disassembling equipment and accessories;
- (d) Preparing, maintaining and cleaning up treatment areas and maintaining supportive areas; and
- (e) Transcribing, recording, or copying treatment documentation generated by a physical therapist or physical therapist assistant. All documents prepared by a physical therapy aide must be signed by the treating physical therapist or physical therapist assistant.

These examples of common situations in which the use of an aide is appropriate is not meant to be all inclusive, or exclusive, of other situations in which a physical therapy aide may perform nonpatient care tasks without direct or onsite supervision. Clearly, when physical therapy treatment and/or intervention has ended and there is no on-going patient care, an aide may perform any multitude of designated, unskilled tasks.

It is the intent of the Montana Board of Physical Therapy Examiners that only licensed individuals perform physical therapy evaluations and treatments as stated in Montana Code Annotated Section 37-11-104. The Board's position is supported by the American Physical Therapy Association under "Provision of Physical Therapy Interventions and Related Tasks HOD P06-00-17-28: "Physical therapists are the only professionals who provide physical therapy interventions. Physical therapist assistants are the only individuals who provide selected physical therapy interventions under the direction and at least general supervision of the physical therapist." This is also consistent with the FSBPT Model Practice Act which states that "a physical therapy aide may perform non-patient care routine tasks without direct or onsite supervision."

It is the duty of the Board to regulate the profession of physical therapy and to protect the public. The Board respects the highly trained professional judgment of its physical therapist licensees who supervise and direct physical therapist assistants and aides in a manner consistent with their professional training and judgment, and the laws and rules of the state of Montana.