

Views From the E-List* – Supervision of Physical Therapy Assistants

Query:

Just starting to use Aquatic therapy at our clinic. Does a PTA treating need to be in direct supervision (line of site) of a PT?

Responses:

Each state has different laws...you need to check your practice act.

We do aquatic therapy at a local YMCA and the only time a PT is in the building is when there is a medicare patient. Medicare requires a PT perform the tx or at least to supervise directly.

No, I am a PTA and have my license so I do not have to be in line of site of a PT. This, I believe, would only be for students. As long as the patient is evaluated by the PT and the PT has set up a plan of care, the PTA can carry out the treatment. I see patients in my facility from 6:30 a.m. until 7:00 a.m. many days before any other therapist is even in the building. I am water safety certified, and we do have a secretary in the building to have a back up for safety reasons, but I have no PT supervision while I am treating. Many days I am the only one in the actual pool area for up to 5 hours by myself, however, other PT's are in the building. I also have patients sent to me from other clinics in the area as none of them have water therapy. All come with a plan of care from a PT at another facility, and their plan of care gets a review from one of our PT's before they begin aquatics with me.

I think as stated before, it depends on your practice act. We don't have to be in line of site. A PT does have to be in the building to treat Medicare patients. All other patients a PT just has to be in a 60 mile radius. So your best option is to look at your state practice act.

As a licensed PTA in Tennessee, no. Only tech's need to be in sight, on site with PT or PTA.

Check your state licensure for clarification on supervision required for a PTA as this may vary from state to state. In Wisconsin, a licensed PTA only need general supervision meaning a PT be available via phone, if needed, while the PTA is practicing, so no direct line of sight. But this may vary in the state that you practice. Also, the comment about students is also correct but may vary state to state. A student is seen as unlicensed personnel and **may** require more supervision by a PT than the PTA. Hopefully this helped.

I have to concur with the others who said "check with your state board". I live in the metro DC area, and at one time I maintained PT licenses in Maryland, Virginia, and DC. Part of my required jurisprudence knowledge was knowing the regs governing supervising PTA's...they vary WILDLY from state to state...take NO advice from this list. Be sure you are in the bounds of the laws so you protect yourself and your license.

If a PTA does not have a certain amount of accumulated hours, they cannot see patients without a PT in the building, in AZ anyway. The PTA does not need to be in line of sight when the PT is in the building. In AZ the hours needed to work alone without a PT on site is 2000 hours. A PT needs to be available for signing off of notes and for any questions that may arise and can be answered by telephone, or to come to the PTA's assistance if it's an absolute need. Again, AZ laws simplified.

**Opinions and suggestions expressed in this column represent e-list member responses to the query posted. They are not represented by the Aquatic Therapy and Rehab Institute and/or the author(s) of this column as recommendations regarding appropriate practice.*