

Board of Physical Therapy

Board Guidance on Receipt of Verbal Orders for Medications by Physical Therapists

Question:

May a physical therapist directly receive a verbal order from a physician for changes to medications that are not typically managed by a physical therapist, such as discontinuing an order for a diuretic medication or decreasing the dosage of a blood pressure medication, where the verbal order is documented in the patient's electronic medical record and transmitted to the physician for signature? The question presented distinguishes a situation in which a physical therapist documents a conversation with a physician, transcribes a written order that has been received into the patient's record, or reconciles or compares patient medications to those listed in the patient's record.

Answer:

Physical therapists should not receive verbal orders from prescribing practitioners for medications that are not otherwise authorized for possession or administration by physical therapists pursuant to Virginia Code § 54.1-3408(E), as described below.

Analysis:

The Board's Regulations do not address specifically the issue of receipt of and/or transcription of verbal orders for medications by physical therapists.

However, a separate body of law, the Virginia Drug Control Act, sets forth the provisions related to prescriptions and prescribers. Virginia Code § 54.1-3408(B) sets forth how prescribing practitioners may communicate prescriptions or orders and who may administer those prescriptions.

Physical therapists are not listed among the practitioners in Virginia Code § 54.1-3408(B) who generally administer drugs and devices and are not permitted by the Drug Control Act to administer or possess controlled substances, except in accordance with Virginia Code § 54.1-3408(E), which provides the following:

E. Pursuant to an oral or written order or standing protocol issued by the prescriber within the course of his professional practice, such prescriber may authorize licensed physical therapists to possess and administer topical corticosteroids, topical lidocaine, and any other Schedule VI topical drug.

Of further note, the Virginia Board of Nursing recently revised [Guidance Document 90-2](#) (Transmittal of Orders by Authorized Agents, effective April 3, 2019) and [Guidance Document 90-31](#) (Whether a Nurse May Administer a Medication That Has Been Transmitted Orally Or In Writing By a Pharmacist Acting as the Prescriber's Agent, effective April 3, 2019). While these documents are intended to provide guidance to licensed nurses regarding the transmittal of orders, they shed additional light on the interpretation of which practitioners may receive verbal orders from prescribers.

For example, Guidance Document 90-2 references Virginia Code § 54.1-3408.01(C) which sets forth the following with regard to oral prescriptions (emphasis added):

*C. The oral prescription referred to in § [54.1-3408](#) shall be transmitted to the pharmacy of the patient's choice by the prescriber or his authorized agent. For the purposes of this section, **an authorized agent of the prescriber shall be an employee of the prescriber who is under his immediate and personal supervision, or if not an employee, an individual who holds a valid license allowing the administration or dispensing of drugs and who is specifically directed by the prescriber.***

While this Code section specifically references transmittal of an oral prescription to a pharmacy, the guidance from the Board of Nursing in Guidance Document 90-2 contemplates a broader application of the transmittal of prescriber's orders:

Prescriber's orders should be transmitted by them directly to a licensed nurse. However, when circumstances preclude direct transmittal, such orders may be transmitted through an authorized agent of the prescriber in accordance with § 54.1-3408.01(C) of the Code of Virginia to the licensed nurse.

A physical therapist is not an individual who holds a valid license allowing the administration or dispensing of drugs, except as provided by Virginia Code § 54.1-3408(E), and typically is not an employee under the immediate and personal supervision of a physician (See Virginia Code §§ 54.1-3473, 54.1-3408, 54.1-3408.01).

Finally, with regard to scope of practice, the Board's Regulations, specifically 18VAC112-20-180, provides the following:

[18VAC112-20-180. Practitioner Responsibility.](#)

A. A practitioner shall not:

1. Perform procedures or techniques that are outside the scope of his practice or for which he is not trained and individually competent; ...

The definition of the practice of "physical therapy" can be found in [Virginia Code § 54.1-3473](#):

"Practice of physical therapy" means that branch of the healing arts that is concerned with, upon medical referral and direction, the evaluation, testing, treatment, reeducation and rehabilitation by physical, mechanical or electronic measures and procedures of individuals who, because of trauma, disease or birth defect, present physical and emotional disorders. The practice of physical therapy also includes the administration, interpretation, documentation, and evaluation of tests and measurements of bodily functions and structures within the scope of practice of the physical therapist. However, the practice of physical therapy does not include the medical diagnosis of disease or injury, the use of Roentgen rays and radium for diagnostic or therapeutic purposes or the use of electricity for shock therapy and surgical purposes including cauterization.

Accordingly, physical therapists should not receive verbal orders from prescribing practitioners for medications that are not otherwise authorized for possession or administration by physical therapists pursuant to Virginia Code § 54.1-3408(E).