

Position Statement on Educating the Physical Therapy Assistant in Mechanical Diagnosis and Therapy®

Within a health care environment where the control of costs is important to both providers and payers, there is an important incentive to use the personnel who can provide care at the lowest cost. Within rehabilitation, this has led to the increasing use of the Physical Therapy Assistant (PTA).

The Board of Directors of The McKenzie Institute® USA offers the following position statement to clarify the recommended practice of Mechanical Diagnosis and Therapy (MDT) by PTAs working closely with Physical Therapists trained in the method. These guidelines were developed following evaluation of state practice acts for PTA's, educational curricula for PTA's, and the APTA and AAOMPT guidelines for the use of PTA's. In addition, the input of all McKenzie Diplomaed and Credentialed practitioners within the USA was sought previously via a mailed questionnaire.

The Role of the PTA

The PTA has a role in assisting a certified McKenzie Physical Therapist (PT) in patient management under the daily or customary direction and supervision of the PT in the clinic. That role is primarily seen in the management of patients with spinal or extremity impairments whose condition has stabilized and further improvements in functional or pain levels are expected to be slow. Of particular importance is the treatment and oversight of patients with dysfunction syndromes and in the later stages of the management of the derangement syndromes. Patients with entrapments, stenosis, irreducible derangements, chronic pain, and other conditions that do not portend rapid improvement, but which could benefit from the care of a certified McKenzie PT, are candidates for treatment by a supervised PTA.

Examination, treatment planning, rapid and appropriate progression of treatment technique, frequent reevaluations and adjustments of the treatment plan, and application of manual techniques must be performed by a certified McKenzie PT, particularly in the early stages of management of the derangement syndrome. The examination and reassessment is required for the management of these patients and the performance of these skills are outside the levels of training and practice scope of PTA's.

The knowledge and skills of the PTA in the treatment of the patient with the diagnosis of a derangement is appropriate once the certified McKenzie PT decides that the patient can progress on to recovery of function. Monitoring the patient's progress, informing the therapist of any change in the patient's status, and continuing the care plan developed by the PT can become the responsibility of the PTA. During this last stage of care, the patient is progressed back to maximum function and is instructed in and encouraged to assume greater levels of activity and positive lifestyles to prevent future occurrences.

Training of the PTA

To support the knowledge and skills of the PTA in the management of patients with spine and extremity pain within Mechanical Diagnosis and Therapy, PTA's are welcome to attend Parts A and B courses. The PTA will need to understand the terminology and logic of MDT, perform basic treatment techniques (exercise procedures, patient instruction, and simple manual physiological techniques), recognize appropriate and inappropriate patient responses, make adjustments in specific exercise techniques when appropriate, and report the patient's status to the supervising MDT certified PT. Parts A and B within the current curriculum cover the required information with appropriate depth of MDT for the spine.

The MIUSA Board of Directors will consider course registration from a PTA to attend a Part C or D course since MDT for the extremities is introduced in Part C (lower extremities) and Part D (upper extremities) under the two conditions noted below. With respect to the advanced spine curriculum for Parts C and D that emphasize further development of examination, clinical reasoning, treatment planning, and problem solving skills for the spine as well as advanced treatment skills such as those primarily used to reduce derangements, which are outside the purview of the PTA, we would reiterate the legal and ethical responsibility of the PTA and PT for reviewing the applicable laws, the Standards of Practice, and the Code of Ethics of their profession.

Conditions to attend Part C and D: The course registration from the PTA must include a letter from a Credentialed or Diplomaed PT who is in the best position to guide appropriate PTA support with respect to the McKenzie system of patient care; and verifies he/she 1) provides daily or customary direction and supervision in the clinic to this PTA, and 2) remains active according to the MDT Certification Continuing Education Standards (CCES). (Please note: PTAs will not be permitted to attend the Advanced Extremities course or the Clinical Skills Update (CSU) courses as the entire advanced content of these courses is beyond the scope of PTA practice.

Upon review of the letter, the Executive Director may approve or disapprove the course attendance of the PTA, or refer to the MIUSA Board of Directors as deemed necessary.

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