



WEST VIRGINIA BOARD OF PHYSICAL THERAPY
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OPINION OF THE WEST VIRGINIA BOARD OF PHYSICAL THERAPY

REGARDING DRY NEEDLING THERAPY¹

I. Introduction

The Board has been presented with an inquiry from a physical therapist licensed by the Board who has received specialized training in dry needling therapy to determine whether dry needling by a physical therapist is permitted under West Virginia physical therapy law and regulations. The Board issues this opinion as the body authorized by the West Virginia Legislature to regulate the practice of physical therapy in this State. The Board has reviewed information regarding the practice of dry needling, the benefits of this treatment modality and the training required to become competent to perform this form of treatment and therapy. The Board has also reviewed opinions from the Boards of Physical Therapy in other states on this subject.²

II. Discussion

The Board first examines the definition of the practice of "physical therapy" under state statute. West Virginia Code § 30-20-9, Scope of practice of a physical therapist, provides in pertinent part:

A physical therapist may:

- (1) *Examine, evaluate and test patients or clients with mechanical physical and developmental impairments, functional limitations, and disabilities or other health and movement related conditions in order to determine a diagnosis, prognosis and plan of treatment intervention, and to access the ongoing effects of intervention. . . .*
- (2) *Alleviate impairments, functional limitations and disabilities by designing, implementing and modifying treatment interventions that may include, but are not limited to: therapeutic exercise; functional training in self-care in relation to motor control function; mobility; in home, community or work integration or reintegration; manual therapy techniques including mobilization of the joints; therapeutic massage; fabrication of assistive, adaptive, orthotic, prosthetic, protective and supportive devices and equipment; airway clearing techniques; integumentary protection and repair techniques; patient-related instruction; mechanical and electrotherapeutic modalities; and physical agent or modalities including, but not limited to, heat, cold light, air, water and sound; (emphasis added).*

¹This opinion is advisory in nature. It does not constitute an administrative rule or regulation and is intended to solely serve as a guideline for persons registered, licensed, or otherwise regulated by the West Virginia Board of Physical Therapy.

² As of March, 2011, at least 15 state boards of physical therapy have issued opinions that dry needling/intramuscular manual therapy is within the scope of physical therapy practice, including all of the states surrounding West Virginia with the exception of Pennsylvania.

Dry needling is a treatment used to improve neuromuscular function. Dry needling is a neurophysiological evidenced-based treatment technique that requires effective manual assessment of the neuromuscular system. Research supports that dry needling improves pain control, reduces muscle tension, normalized biochemical and electrol dysfunction of motor endplates, and facilitates an accelerated return to active rehabilitation.³ Physical therapists may be trained to utilize dry manual needling in conjunction with manual physical therapy interventions. As such, dry needling falls within the definition of physical therapy as defined under West Virginia law and regulations. There is nothing contained in the statute or regulations promulgated by this Board and approved by the Legislature to prohibit a licensed physical therapist from performing dry needling so long as the physical therapist is competent in performing this intervention.

Therefore, the Board is of the opinion dry needling is within the scope of the practice of "physical therapy" as defined in West Virginia law by the Legislature in WV Code § 30-20-9. While dry needling is within the scope of practice of physical therapy, a physical therapist must practice only those procedures that the physical therapist is competent to perform. The Board may deny an application for license, place a licensee on probation, limit or restrict a license, suspend a license or revoke any license issued by the Board, upon satisfactory proof that a licensee has been convicted of a felony or is, in his or her professional capacity, engaged in conduct, practices or acts constituting professional negligence or a willful departure from accepted standards of professional conduct in violation of W. Va. Code § 30-20-1 et seq. or Title 16, Series 1, Rules of the Board. W. Va. Code St. R. § 16-3-4.

III. Conclusion

As the agency authorized by the West Virginia Legislature to regulate the practice of physical therapy in this State, the Board is empowered to interpret its statutes and regulations. In summary, the Board is of the opinion that dry needling is within the scope of the practice of "physical therapy" as defined by West Virginia Code §30-20-9.

West Virginia Board of Physical Therapy

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³See, American Academy of Orthopedic Manual Physical Therapists position statement on dry needling – <http://aaompt.org/members/statements.cfm>