

### **1.1 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines to physiotherapists regarding both their professional and legal responsibilities in the way they manage and supervise therapy assistants.

### **1.2 SCOPE**

This policy applies to any person practising physiotherapy in NSW.

### **1.3 REFERENCES AND RELATED POLICIES**

NSW Physiotherapists Registration Board Policy on Professional Conduct.  
Public Health Act 1991 (NSW)

### **1.4 DEFINITIONS**

A *therapy assistant* is a health care worker who assists in a client's treatment program under the supervision of a physiotherapist.

## **POLICY**

### **2 The key issues/principles that physiotherapists should be cognisant of are:**

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES  
EDUCATION/TRAINING  
SUPERVISION and TASK DELEGATION  
FUNCTION/ROLE OF THE THERAPY ASSISTANT  
TREATMENT MODALITIES  
SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES  
EMPLOYMENT OF PHYSIOTHERAPY STUDENTS AS THERAPY ASSISTANTS  
NOT BILLING FOR SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE THERAPY ASSISTANT

### **POLICY INTERPRETATION**

#### **2.1 ETHICAL PRINCIPLES**

**It is the physiotherapist's responsibility to ensure the therapy assistant is aware of the ethical behaviours expected by the facility and also aware of their legal responsibilities. This includes:**

- Respect for the rights and dignity of the individual
- Confidentiality
- Standard of care
- Limits of competence
- Loyalty to the employer
- Standards of personal behaviour
- Restriction on the use of the title physiotherapist
- Modalities they are able to use

#### **2.2 EDUCATION/TRAINING**

**The physiotherapist must be satisfied that the therapy assistant has had appropriate training commensurate with their level of responsibility, experience and tasks that have been delegated to them. This is to include:**

- Basic medical terminology
- Basic anatomy where appropriate
- Emergency procedures
- Infection control standards
- Manual handling

## Policy for physiotherapists working with therapy assistants

- Client autonomy
- Conflict of interest
- Personal accountability for their own actions
- Confidentiality and privacy
- Child protection
- Occupational health and safety
- Appropriate intervention and management procedures

### 2.3 SUPERVISION AND TASK DELEGATION

**The physiotherapist must supervise the therapy assistant to ensure a high standard of client outcomes.**

- The supervising physiotherapist must provide adequate supervision and/or instructions according to the competencies of the assistant, the severity and the complexity of the patient's disorder and the clinical setting. Safety precautions are to be included
- The physiotherapist must observe the guidelines set out in the Policy on Professional Conduct. Particular reference should be made to **Procedure 2.3**

*"Physiotherapists must accept full responsibility for all interventions undertaken by them and staff working under their instruction or direction. No service or treatment shall be delegated to a person who is not qualified and competent to undertake that service or treatment."*

**There are tasks which must not be delegated to therapy assistants in any circumstances**

- Interpretation of the physiotherapy referral, diagnosis or prognosis (with the exception of client triaging)
- Conducting the initial physiotherapy interview or assessment with the client
- Interpretation of assessment findings, and establishment treatment goals
- Development of a physical diagnosis
- Planning, initiating, instituting or modifying physiotherapy treatment programs
- Documentation of the physiotherapist's treatment
- Initiating discharge from physiotherapy treatment

### 2.4 FUNCTION/ROLE OF THE THERAPY ASSISTANT

**The role and function of the therapy assistant is to be determined by the employing physiotherapist**

- The therapy assistant is responsible to and must work under the close direction of a designated physiotherapist
- The therapy assistant must not represent him or herself as a physiotherapist or physical therapist, directly or through implication
- The therapy assistant cannot provide or bill for physiotherapy services
- The therapy assistant shall maintain confidentiality of client information and shall not discuss the same with the client
- The therapy assistant should document the intervention performed by themselves

### 2.5 TREATMENT MODALITIES

**There are certain modalities, which, in accordance with NSW legislation<sup>1</sup> physiotherapists must not delegate to therapy assistants in any circumstances.**

- Microwave diathermy
- Shortwave diathermy
- Manipulation
- Interferential

**With the above exceptions, physiotherapists may delegate the use of treatment modalities by therapy assistants under the following circumstances**

- The physiotherapist has completed the appropriate assessment procedures, including sensation testing and warnings
- The physiotherapist has checked the contraindications regarding the use of a modality prior to a program of care being implemented
- The locus of the treatment area is delineated by the physiotherapist
- The dosage and time is set by the physiotherapist
- The physiotherapist has given all the appropriate warnings and information to the client

## **Policy for physiotherapists working with therapy assistants**

- The physiotherapist shall ensure the therapy assistant warns the client before the application of each modality
- The therapy assistant has been trained in the safe application of the modality or treatment
- The physiotherapist must perform a reassessment of the client at the conclusion of the application of the modality or treatment where possible
- The physiotherapist must monitor the status of the client during the program of care

### **2.6 SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

**Where the physiotherapy assistant may be undertaking activities in situations where there is no direct visual supervision by the physiotherapist, as in the rural or aged care setting, certain arrangements must be made to ensure high standard of client outcomes and safety. These arrangements may include:**

- A specifically designated physiotherapist supervisor
- Documented instructions from the supervising physiotherapist which are regularly reviewed
- Direct interaction between the supervising physiotherapist, therapy assistant at the place of work at an appropriate frequency
- A designated on site health care professional who will respond in an emergency
- A designated health care professional qualified and willing to act in an advisory capacity on behalf of the supervising physiotherapist
- The supervising physiotherapist being available by telephone
- An appropriate number of therapy assistants per physiotherapist based on the needs of the client load
- The level of supervision being dependent on the nature of the tasks to be performed, the stability of the client's condition, and the complexity of the client's condition

### **2.7 EMPLOYMENT OF PHYSIOTHERAPY STUDENTS AS THERAPY ASSISTANTS**

This policy does not preclude a person who is a physiotherapy student being employed as a therapy assistant. However this person must be clearly identified as a therapy assistant and not as a student.

### **2.8 NOT BILLING FOR SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE THERAPY ASSISTANT**

The physiotherapist should not bill for services substantially provided by the therapy assistant.

### **3.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND REFERENCES**

Clinical Practice Statement 3A and 3B College of Physical Therapy, British Columbia  
Physiotherapy Assistants: Policy Statements and Guidelines Australian Physiotherapy Association NAC 19/2002  
Assistants in Physiotherapy Practices/Services. Physiotherapists Board of Queensland

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<sup>1</sup> NSW Public Health Act 1991 No 10 Section 10 AD