



HEALTH PROFESSIONS LICENSING AUTHORITY

TITLE: The Role of Physiotherapy Assistants – Position Statement

EFFECTIVE DATE: May 2004

REVIEWED: June 2009

BOARD: Physiotherapists Board of the Northern Territory

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

There is currently no national consensus on a single name for this group of workers and these titles may include¹:

- Physiotherapy assistant	- Community assistant
- Allied health assistant	- Hydrotherapy aide
- Rehabilitation assistant	- Exercise therapist
- Physiotherapy aide	- Therapy Aide

***Throughout this document they will be referred to as physiotherapy assistant.*

“The *Australian Physiotherapy Association* defines a physiotherapy assistant as a health care worker who works under the supervision of a registered physiotherapist and holds a Certificate IV in Allied Health Assistance (Physiotherapy) or equivalent.”

The Physiotherapists Board of the Northern Territory (the Board) advises that physiotherapy assistants cannot, under any circumstances, substitute for a physiotherapist in assessment, diagnosis, program planning/program evaluation or client/family education. Physiotherapy assistants and organisations cannot claim to provide physiotherapy if the service is provided by an unsupervised assistant.

The Board’s position regarding physiotherapy assistants working in the Northern Territory is as follows:

1. Employers of physiotherapy assistants are encouraged to view documentation on the Australian Physiotherapy Association and Australian Physiotherapy Council websites for additional information relating employees in these roles;
2. Physiotherapy assistants must be under the supervision of a physiotherapist at all times. The frequency and nature of this supervision is subject to the expert judgement of the supervising physiotherapist and not dictated by other staff;
3. The physiotherapist remains at all times responsible for the delivery of the physiotherapy treatment that is provided by the physiotherapy assistants;
4. Physiotherapy assistants can undertake a limited range of physiotherapy treatments under the supervision of a physiotherapist. Prior to the physiotherapist delegating to the

¹ Australian Physiotherapy Association, Position Statement – Working with a Physiotherapy Assistant or Other Support Worker, March 2008; www.physiotherapy.asn.au;

physiotherapy assistant certain treatments, they must consider the complexity of each treatment, and the skill level of the physiotherapy assistant;

5. Procedures performed by a physiotherapy assistant must be in accordance with a prescribed treatment plan²; and
6. The supervising physiotherapist must be satisfied that the physiotherapy assistant has had appropriate training commensurate with their level of responsibility, experience and tasks that have been delegated to them. This is to include³:
 - a. Basic medical terminology
 - b. Basic anatomy where appropriate
 - c. Emergency procedures
 - d. Infection control standards
 - e. Manual handling
 - f. Client autonomy
 - g. Conflict of interest
 - h. Personal accountability of their own actions
 - i. Confidentiality and privacy
 - j. Child protection
 - k. Occupational health and safety
 - l. Appropriate intervention and management procedures

Legislative requirements

Under the *Health Practitioners Act 2004*, Section 101 Offence to practise health care if unregistered;

(1) A person must not –

- (a) carry out an act that by or under an Act is required to be carried out by a health practitioner; or
- (b) carry out an act that by or under an Act is required to be carried out by a health practitioner holding a practising certificate, unless he or she is registered or enrolled and holds a practising certificate.

Penalty 500 penalty units⁴

Section 103 False claims

Subsection (1) and Subsection (2) make it an offence for a person to hold themselves out or allow themselves to be held out as being registered or enrolled if they are not registered or enrolled and hold a practising certificate.

Penalty 500 penalty units

REFERENCES

Australian Physiotherapy Association – www.physiotherapy.asn.au

Australian Physiotherapy Council - www.physiocouncil.com.au

NSW Physiotherapists Registration Board – www.physioreg.health.nsw.gov.au

**All forms and any other updated information regarding Physiotherapy registration can be found on the Physiotherapists Board of the Northern Territory's website www.nt.gov.au/health/registrationboards

² Australian Physiotherapy Council – Guidelines for physiotherapists working with assistants in physiotherapy practices/services; December 2007; www.physiocouncil.com.au

³ NSW Physiotherapists Registration Board – Policy for physiotherapists working with therapy assistants; 2008; www.physioreg.health.nsw.gov.au/

⁴ A penalty unit is a monetary sum as defined in the *Penalty Units Act 1999*.