

Position Statement – NC Board of Physical Therapy Examiners

8. Physical Therapists Who Perform Massage

Adopted by the NC Board of PT Examiners - December 23, 1999

Reviewed by the Board – September 23, 2010, June 17, 2015, June 6, 2018

The North Carolina Board of Physical Therapy Examiners has been requested to address the performance of massage by physical therapists in light of the requirements of the North Carolina Physical Therapy Practice Act ("PTPA") and the North Carolina Massage and Bodywork Therapy Practice Act ("MBTPA"). In G.S. §90-622(5), the practice of massage and bodywork therapy excludes the use of modalities for which a license to practice physical therapy is required. In G.S. §90-623(a) and (b), a person must be licensed to represent himself or herself as a massage and bodywork therapist or to use any terms that imply that practice. G.S. §90-624(1) provides an exemption for licensed individuals who are acting within the scope of their authorized practice. G.S. §90-270.34(b)(1) provides a similar exemption from the PTPA for those licensed and practicing under a separate act, and G.S. §90-270.34(b)(2) provides an exemption from the PTPA for simple massage not intended to constitute the practice of physical therapy.

In view of these statutory provisions, it is clear that a licensed physical therapist can perform massage as an element of the practice of physical therapy. However, if an individual is going to represent himself or herself as a massage and bodywork therapist, that individual must be licensed pursuant to the provisions of the MBTPA. Therefore, it appears that a physical therapist can employ massage techniques as an element of the practice of physical therapy, but to use the phrase "massage and bodywork therapist" or similar phrases would require licensure under the MBTPA.

If a physical therapist is also a massage and bodywork therapist, presumably that person could hold himself or herself out as being able to practice both professions. Since the sole basis for the existence of both practice acts is the protection of the public health, safety and welfare, the actions of a person licensed in both disciplines should be measured against this standard. In conclusion, while there is no statute or rule that would prevent a dual licensee from representing that fact, the patient or client must understand that either physical therapy or massage therapy is being administered, not both. Likewise, the practitioner should not represent or imply that two services are being furnished at the same time.

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