

## **ORDERS FOR X-RAYS BY PHYSICAL THERAPISTS**

### **OBJECTIVE: Clarify ability of physical therapists to order x-rays in Wisconsin**

Wisconsin law allows physical therapists to provide services to patients without a written referral from a physician or other provider in a variety of situations. For example, physical therapists in Wisconsin do not need a written referral to provide conditioning services, injury prevention services, or treatment of musculoskeletal injuries (except for acute fractures or soft tissue avulsions) related to work, home, leisure, recreational and educational environments.

The ability of physical therapists to order x-rays is consistent with current practice in Wisconsin and a letter dated December 12, 2005 from the legal counsel of the Physical Therapist Affiliated Credentialing Board (the "PTACB") to the Wisconsin Physical Therapy Association. The letter indicates that physical therapists may refer a patient for diagnostic imaging to an appropriate health care practitioner qualified to perform the tests, even though physical therapists may not administer roentgen rays or radium themselves. The letter also indicates that physical therapists may use the results of the tests to determine an appropriate course of physical therapy or to determine whether referral to another health care provider is necessary. Accordingly, many physical therapists in Wisconsin have ordered x-rays for patients now for some time.

However, under a Wisconsin law enacted in February 2010 (Wis. Stat. § 462.04), radiographers and limited x-ray machine operators may only use x-ray equipment on humans if authorized by a prescription or order from a physician, dentist, podiatrist, chiropractor, advanced practice nurse prescriber or physician assistant. This new law forgot to include physical therapists and, as a result, creates a barrier for physical therapists to order x-rays. Moreover, it is inconsistent with the current practice of many physical therapists in Wisconsin.

Accordingly, Wis. Stat. § 462.04 should be amended to read:

**462.04 Prescription or order required.** A person who holds a license or limited X-ray machine operator permit under this chapter may not use diagnostic X-ray equipment on humans for diagnostic purposes unless authorized to do so by prescription or order of a physician licensed under s. 448.04(1)(a), a dentist licensed under s. 447.04(1), a podiatrist licensed under s. 448.63, a chiropractor licensed under s. 446.02, an advanced practice nurse certified under s. 441.16(2), ~~or~~ a physician assistant licensed under s. 448.04(1)(f), or a physical therapist licensed under s. 448.53.