



California Physical Therapy Association Key Messages for 2009 Legislative and Public Relations Campaign

Direct Access is Good for the Patient.

- Direct access eliminates the delay for treatment.
 - After receiving a timely evaluation from a physical therapist, patients often experience a delay in treatment while waiting to get a diagnosis from a physician.

Physical Therapists are Recognized as Movement Experts.

- Physical therapists are required to have extensive education, including a minimum of seven years and a graduate degree.
- Since January 2001, only physical therapy programs at the master's and doctoral level are considered for accreditation.
- Physical therapists are required to undergo rigorous education and clinical training necessary to examine, evaluate, classify impairments and treat patients.
- Physical therapists are licensed by the California Physical Therapy Board.

Physical Therapists Treat Impairment of Function or Impact of a Disease; Physical Therapists *DO NOT* Provide Medical Diagnosis.

- Physical therapists screen patients to determine the appropriate level of physical therapy to provide.
- Physical therapists treat the impact of disease on function.
- California law requires physical therapists to complete an evaluation.
- Physical therapists are required by law to refer patients back to the appropriate medical provider if it is determined that physical therapy is not appropriate for the patient.

Physical Therapists are Excellent Evaluators.

- Physician referrals often lack critical information and don't report the diagnosis or cause of a patient's pain or impairment.
- Physical therapists are trained to identify why a patient is experiencing specific symptoms and develops a customized plan to initiate care based on an evaluation.
- Commonly used diagnostic tools, such as x-rays and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), don't always identify a disease and require physical therapists to effectively recognize the disease.
- Physical therapists often identify medical problems outside of the scope of physical therapy requiring them to refer back to the primary care provider.

Patient Safety is Reinforced Through Direct Access.

- Patient safety is the number one priority for physical therapists when providing treatment.
- In states that have direct access:
 - Healthcare Providers Service Organization (HPSO), the largest liability provider for physical therapists in the United States, has not increased premiums;
 - The number of licenses that have been suspended or removed by the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapists has not increased.
- Opponents to direct access for physical therapists have **no documented evidence** that patient safety is at risk.
- Sponsored legislation will recognize the importance of patient safety by requiring physical therapists to refer patients back to a physician.