

Practice

Telehealth Possibilities Increasing for PTs and PTAs

With ongoing advancements in technology and increased demand for care, telehealth has gained momentum as a tool for meeting service gaps and increasing access to care across Washington state.

Also known as telemedicine, telehealth is simply the provision of health care services when the provider and patient are not in the same physical location. The patient care is provided via electronic communication which may be delivered using synchronous technology that allows real-time, interactive two-way audio and visual communication (think videoconferencing platforms) or with asynchronous technology including store and forward technology (recorded and stored data for future analysis or reference).

Washington is one of the few states that explicitly allows PTs and PTAs to provide care via telehealth (WAC 246-915-187 Use of telehealth in the practice of physical therapy). This law doesn't expand PT scope of practice and all of the same standards of care need to be met as if the patient is receiving care in person. Besides defining telehealth in PT, Washington's law also specifies that documentation for the care indicate that the visit occurred via telehealth.

Another important factor for PTs and PTAs in Washington to consider if they wish to provide care via telehealth is that the location of the patient determines where they are receiving care. So since licensure compact privileges won't be available for several more months and since only a few states currently allow PTs and PTAs to provide telehealth – this effectively means that you may only provide telehealth in Washington state at this time. But as compact licensure spreads across the country and additional

states add telehealth to PT and PTA scope of practice, this situation will improve.

Additional regulations that will increase access to telehealth over time include a provision in the Affordable Care Act that encourages providers to use it (although Medicare will not currently pay for it), a law passed by the Washington State Legislature in 2016 (SSB 6519) that established the Washington State Telemedicine Collaborative and increased payment prospects for telehealth services, and an additional bill introduced during the 2018 legislative session (SB 6399) that would, if passed, create a telehealth payment pilot program.

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For more information visit:
www.apta.org/Telehealth/LegislationRegulation
www.wsha.org/policy-advocacy/issues/telemedicine/washington-state-telemedicine-collaborative



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