



# MICHIGAN PHYSICAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION

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**Testimony in Support of:  
Substitute for Senate Bill 151  
Provided by: Barbara J. Simmons, PTA, M.Ed.  
March 4, 2009**

My name is Barbara Simmons, I am here today to speak in support of the substitute for Senate Bill 151 as it relates to the licensure of physical therapist assistants (PTAs) in the State of Michigan. I am a 1980 graduate of Kellogg Community College with an associate's of applied science degree for physical therapist assistants. I earned subsequent bachelor's and master's degrees, but frankly, the applied science degree was, by far, the hardest of the three. I am currently working at my alma mater as an instructor and as the clinical coordinator for the Physical Therapist Assistant Educational Program.

As clinical coordinator I travel to meet with students during clinical rotations in physical therapy facilities throughout the state and region. This provides a chance for me to meet with graduate PTAs as well as physical therapists (PTs) in the field. As an instructor I also teach course content, and lead clinical discussions relating to what students see and how they feel about their experiences within the clinical setting. These opportunities to receive input provide me with a strong sense of the feelings of clinical PTs and PTAs related to licensure and the pitfalls of not having PTAs licensed in Michigan.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (commonly referred to as Medicare), as of January of 2008, made a policy change requiring new PTA graduates to successfully complete a national exam by January of 2010 in order to continue working with patients under Medicare. Current and future students will be mandated to take the national exam upon graduation even if the substitute for Senate Bill 151 does not pass. If that should happen, they will have to apply for licensure through another state in order to sit for the exam and subsequently qualify to work with Medicare patients in Michigan.

For those who graduated prior to January 1, 2008, there are many unanswered questions. Various paragraphs within the February 18<sup>th</sup> Electronic Code of Federal Regulations, The Physician Fee Schedule Final Rule from 2008, and various items from the Federal Register appear to conflict regarding requirements related to whether or not these individuals will have to take the national examination before January 1, 2010. This could cause logistical difficulties in our state if all working PTAs have to complete a national examination by that date in order to continue working with Medicare patients. To give you an idea of the numbers we are talking about, there are currently nine accredited PTA programs in Michigan. Just from Kellogg Community College, we have 591 graduates and current addresses for 457 of them. Of those 457, 396 still reside in Michigan. Those 396 are only a fraction of the physical therapists assistants currently working in the state who may need to sit for an examination.



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I recently polled my listserv of approximately 210 graduate PTAs, asking for scenarios relating to why Michigan needs licensure for Physical Therapist Assistants. Here is a synopsis of some of the replies:

- There were multiple responses noting that there are persons who have not graduated from an accredited PTA Program calling themselves "PTAs" and signing *and billing for services* as PTAs.
- One response noted a Physical Therapist who was trained outside of the United States who was unable to pass the national exam for PT licensure and subsequently tried to convince an employer that he/she should be allowed to work as a Physical Therapist Assistant.
- One PTA noted that a patient asked her about her license, which is from Ohio. The patient was very disturbed and concerned that Michigan did not provide a mechanism for licensure.
- One employer hired a PTA and, after delving deeper into the educational background, discovered the person had been deceitful with his educational background information. If the substitute for SB 151 passes, a licensing board would have the authority to verify information and confirm completion of degrees from an accredited program.
- There are facilities that require all of their Michigan PTAs to obtain licensure because they provide personnel to facilities in multiple states. Those PTAs must go to other states, usually Ohio or Indiana, to acquire a license. A number of our graduates have reported that they then have decided to stay in the other state since they "were licensed there anyway." It would be good public policy for the State of Michigan to keep those workers within the state to live and work, which would benefit *our* state's economy.

Another problem that has been noted is that when there is information that needs to be disseminated to all PTAs, there is no way to do so. Educational programs have lists of graduates, but not all addresses are current—Kellogg Community College graduated its first class in 1973. Without credentialing, there is no way to even know the total number of PT Assistants in the state—no way to provide standardized information regarding Medicare changes, licensure updates and so on. Licensing of these individuals will provide a mechanism to account for PTAs in Michigan.

My most significant reason for speaking here today is this: As a PTA Program clinical coordinator and instructor, it deeply concerns me that I have multiple students *each year* who, prior to entering the curriculum, have worked as "aides" or "technicians" within physical therapy departments. They have provided some interesting information. Some were given the title "PTA" as their job classification. They explain that they were simply given instructions to provide a treatment, and so they would set the machine to the specified parameters and complete the treatment. Often these students are horrified as they go through the educational courses and learn what injuries they could have inflicted on patients as part of their previous duties.

The substitute for Senate Bill 151 includes wording to define and protect the title of a licensed physical therapist assistant and would also provide guidelines defining the practice of PTAs, thereby assuring that only qualified personnel perform specific interventions.

Thank you for allowing me to speak on this issue today. As a physical therapist assistant in the State of Michigan, I am strongly advocating the passage of the substitute for Senate Bill 151, and urge you to support it by moving it forward to the Senate floor.

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