

Illinois State Medical Society



MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Members, Illinois General Assembly

FROM: James E. Tierney, Vice President
Robert John Kane, Legal Counsel
Alison A. Burnett, Assistant Vice President
Erin O'Brien, Assistant Vice President

Illinois Strategies, LLC
John Potts
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RE: Oppose SB 2821 – Direct Access to Physical Therapists

DATE: January 26, 2012

The 12,000 members of the Illinois State Medical Society respectfully request your “NO” vote on SB 2821, a measure allowing physical therapists to initiate patient care by removing a provision in state law that requires discipline for treating patients without first receiving a diagnosis and referral from a physician. Its passage would put patients at risk, as physical therapists do not have adequate training to make the medical diagnosis that is necessary for the initiation of appropriate treatment.

Physical therapists are trained to treat specific conditions of the musculoskeletal system. As part of a medical “team,” they play an essential part in specific kinds of treatments. But allowing physical therapists to treat without a medical diagnosis would permit them to diagnose and treat beyond the level of their education and training.

The Illinois Physical Therapy Association would have you believe that it is more costly for the patient to see a physician for a proper diagnosis and referral for physical therapy treatment. We believe their assumption is erroneous and that a referral is both good medicine and cost effective. **The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services covers physical therapy services only AFTER a physician or other qualified health care professional has certified that such treatment is necessary.** While physical therapists can bill Medicare directly, the services must be ordered by a physician or other authorized professional. Furthermore, the patient must be under a physician's care and the therapist must regularly document the patient's progress back to the referring professional. This requirement exists to maintain quality of care, reduce over-utilization of physical therapy services and save on costs.

The IPTA would have you believe that the majority of states have unlimited direct access to their services. In reality, few states offer unlimited direct access and those that do have many limitations on the types and duration of treatments that can be provided.

SB 2827 fails to provide any meaningful patient safety protections. Though the bill requires a physical therapist to refer cases to a health care professional when a patient's condition is beyond his or her scope of practice, it fails the patient because it assumes that the physical therapist can make a medical diagnosis in the first place. The bill also states that a patient must be referred to a health care professional if that patient does not improve in 90 days. Allowing 90 days to pass before appropriate treatment is initiated is just plain wrong.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to vote “NO” vote on SB 2821.