

Report to the Legislature

Physical Therapists and Spinal Manipulation

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Executive Summary

In 2013, the legislature passed [Substitute Engrossed House Bill 2160](#), which expanded the scope of practice for physical therapists. The expanded scope allowed for the practice of spinal manipulation provided the practitioner obtained an endorsement from the Department of Health (department). The bill required the Board of Physical Therapy (board) to review any actions taken against a physical therapist whose performance of spinal manipulation resulted in an injury to a patient. The board was also required to consult with the Chiropractic Quality Assurance Commission (commission) on their findings before submitting the report to the legislature.

A review team reviewed all applicable physical therapist complaints from the effective date of the bill to the June 1, 2019. At the conclusion of the review, the team identified five potential complaints that involved mention of spinal or neck adjustment. The review found no cases in which spinal manipulation resulted in an injury to a patient. These findings were shared with both the board and the commission.

Introduction

In order to perform spinal manipulation, a physical therapist must document specific training and obtain a spinal manipulation endorsement from the department. As of June 1, 2019, 233 physical therapists obtained this endorsement out of 7,241 licensees.

The bill required the board to report to the legislature on a review of any actions taken against physical therapists whose “performance of spinal manipulation resulted in physical harm to a patient.” The board is required to consult with the commission before submitting the report.

Methodology

In January 2019, a cross-disciplinary team began reviewing every complaint lodged against a physical therapist from May 1, 2014 to June 1, 2019, a total of 289 complaints. Of these 289 cases, five cases were identified as having a possible connection to spinal or neck manipulation. The identified cases were pulled from archives and reviewed by the team. The findings were then presented to the executive director of the commission¹. Representatives from the review team presented findings to both the board and the commission.

¹ To ensure transparency, the commission staff was invited to review each case that met the criteria.

Findings

The review team identified five complaints that potentially involved spine or neck manipulations performed by a physical therapist on a patient. Of these five cases, none were determined to involve a patient who experienced “physical harm” due to the procedure. The department found that, since the endorsement was created, no physical therapists have had disciplinary action taken against them for performance of spinal manipulation that resulted in physical harm to a patient.

