

Expansion of Scope of Practice to Provide Assistance in Responding to COVID-19

Athletic Trainers

On May 6, 2020, Governor Tom Wolf signed an [Order of the Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to Enhance Protections for Health Care Professionals](#) (the “Executive Order”). Its purpose is to afford health care practitioners protection against liability for good faith actions taken in response to the call to supplement the health care provider workforce battling COVID-19.

During the course of the pandemic and the disaster declaration associated with it, the Wolf Administration has used its authority under the declaration to suspend a number of regulations and regulatory statutes. The effect of several of the suspensions is to expand the scope of practice and to relax the supervision requirements for numerous health care licensees, allowing these professionals to perform acts they would not otherwise be authorized to perform in the ordinary course of their practice.

More specifically, as set forth in the Executive Order, “temporary suspension[s] of portions of 63 P.S. §§ 42.2, 271.2, 422.2, 625.101-625.1106, and 49 Pa. Code §§ 18.502, 18.509, 25.702, 25.709, 33.208” have been granted “to provide opportunities to trained health care practitioners, not currently on the front lines of the pandemic response, with the opportunity to assist in response efforts if they so desire. The expansion of the scope of practice of Dentists, Oral Surgeons, Athletic Trainers, Chiropractors and Podiatrists would permit MDs and DOs to delegate certain practices to these practitioners to support the efforts to expand the response needed in hospitals, emergency departments, nursing homes and long-term care facilities during the COVID-19 disaster emergency.” For **athletic trainers** under the State Board of Medicine or the State Board of Osteopathic Medicine, the effect of these suspensions is as follows:

Athletic Trainers may perform the following tasks for the duration of the emergency declaration: managing and providing care, including emergency care, to all persons – not just those who are physically active or those with injuries –under the direction of a licensed physician; assisting with sprains, strains, wound care and other minor injuries; referring to and accepting patients from physicians, dentists and podiatrists, and conferring with physicians, dentists and podiatrists regarding patients; providing basic care in hospitals and long-term care facilities (e.g., assisted living residences, personal care homes, “nursing homes”) including activities of daily living such as bed changes, feedings, baths, and the like; performing other tasks lawfully delegated by an M.D. or D.O., without requiring a written referral, prescription, or a written protocol approved by a supervising physician.

Athletic trainers may NOT perform surgery, conduct any other invasive procedure, or prescribe any medications or controlled substances.

A licensee’s obligation to competently perform their duties consistent with their level of training, education and experience is a guiding principle that is both constant and unwavering. Neither the Executive Order nor the temporary suspensions alters that obligation. Moreover, when performing tasks to aid in the COVID-19 response that are outside of their normal scope of practice, licensees (and those working towards licensure) shall not undertake any activity for which they are not already licensed or authorized to perform without first obtaining the appropriate training and support to perform those tasks competently.

The Executive Order shall remain in effect for the duration of the disaster emergency.