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Some License Requirements for Qualified Physician Assistants Are Suspended During Coronavirus Emergency

In order to allow physician assistants practicing under the state Board of Osteopathic Medicine to more easily and effectively assist with emergency response efforts to COVID-19, Governor Wolf granted the Department of State's request to suspend requirements pertaining to written agreements and several other items. **As explained below, similar restrictions and requirements are also temporarily suspended for physician assistants under the state Board of Medicine.**

For physician assistants practicing under the Board of Osteopathic Medicine, the following requirements are suspended:

- o The Osteopathic Medical Practice Act restricts physicians to the supervision of four physician assistants, but they can apply for a waiver from the state board of Osteopathic Medicine to supervise more. Governor Wolf has suspended both the ratio and waiver requirements.
- o The requirement is suspended that all physicians with whom a physician assistant is assisting be named on the written agreement. Only one primary and one substitute physician will need to be named.
- o The board regulations that require contact information for at least two substitute supervising physicians are suspended because if a primary physician and substitute physician are named, their contact information will be in the Department of State's PALS system.
- o The requirement that written agreements receive board approval is suspended. Written agreements will be effective upon submission to the board.
- o The requirement is suspended that temporary authorization to practice be issued for up to 120 days upon board receipt of a complete written agreement.
- o Countersignature requirements outlined in the Osteopathic Medical Practice Act will be suspended, provided that the number of patient records reviewed is sufficient to assure adequate review of the physician assistant's scope of practice.
- o Board regulations that require countersignature from a physician within 10 days and at least weekly review by a physician of medical records prepared by a physician assistant are suspended.
- o The requirement that the board must approve use of a physician assistant at "satellite operations" is suspended. This will allow more physician assistants to practice wherever they are needed during the disaster declaration.

For physician assistants practicing under the Board of Medicine, after review, the department determined that no suspensions pertaining to written agreements are required.

This allowance is due to an emergency medical services clause in their regulations that permits licensed physician assistants to respond to a need for medical care created by a declared state of emergency by rendering care consistent with relevant standards of care. It applies to physician

assistants licensed in Pennsylvania and physician assistants licensed or authorized to practice in any other state **who are responding to a need for medical care created by a declared state of emergency. However, to provide clarity to licensees, the following statutory and regulatory requirements have been suspended:**

- 1. The “supervising physician-to-physician assistant” ratio requirements set forth in the Medical Practice Act, and the need for practitioners to apply to the Board of Medicine for a waiver to increase the ratio.**
- 2. The requirement that the supervising physician (under whom a physician assistant will be practicing) be named on the written agreement.**
- 3. The requirement regarding approval for a physician assistant to be utilized in a satellite location.**
- 4. The requirement that written agreements receive Board approval. Written agreements are effective upon submission to the Board.**
- 5. Countersignature and weekly review requirements under the Medical Practice Act and the Board’s regulations. The number of patient records reviewed must be sufficient to assure adequate review of the physician assistant’s compliance with the relevant standards of care.**
- 6. Physician assistants licensed or authorized to practice in any other state who are responding to a need for medical care created by a declared state of emergency in this Commonwealth do not have to submit a written agreement to the Board during this time period.**