



Choosing Your Physical Therapist

You are the most important member of your health care team, and you are entitled to choose the most appropriate health care professional to meet your goals.

Freedom of Choice

You have the freedom to choose your own physical therapist. Currently, you may be evaluated by a physical therapist without a physician's referral in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In addition, all 50 states and the District of Columbia allow some level of treatment by a physical therapist without a physician's referral.

Keep in mind that your insurance policy may require a visit to the primary care physician first or may limit your access to preferred providers only.

Your physician may refer you for physical therapy that is to be provided in the physician's office, or to a facility in which the physician has a financial interest. If this is your situation, be aware that you have the right to choose your own physical therapist and that you are not obligated to receive physical therapy in any specific facility. Always insist that your physical therapy be provided by a licensed physical therapist.

How to Choose a Physical Therapist

Make sure that you receive physical therapy from a licensed physical therapist. Physical therapists are professional health care providers who are licensed by the state in which they practice. If you are receiving physical therapy from a physical therapist assistant, be sure that he or she is supervised by a licensed physical therapist.

Ask the physical therapist's clinic if it participates with your insurance company. Receiving care from a participating physical therapist should minimize your financial responsibility. There may be good reasons, however, to see a physical therapist who does not participate with your insurance plan. If you need a physical therapist who has special skills related to your particular condition, or if the location or other aspects of the care or the facility meet your needs, this may be a good choice for you.

Ask whether the physical therapist's clinic will submit claims on your behalf to your insurance company. Some policies require copayments for services, and the amount of the copayment will depend on whether the physical therapist is part of the insurer's



Page 2

Your Appointment

Your first visit should include an evaluation by the physical therapist. Your physical therapist will perform an examination to identify current and potential problems. Based on the results of the examination, and considering your specific goals, your physical therapist will design a plan of care to include specific interventions and will propose a timetable to achieve these goals and optimize your movement and function. Your physical therapist will likely provide you with instructions to perform exercises at home to facilitate your recovery.

You should feel comfortable asking your physical therapist any questions regarding your course of care, including specifics regarding interventions and expectations.

Find a physical therapist in your area at www.moveforwardpt.com

Acknowledgment: Shannon L. Hoffman, PT, DPT

All contents © 2011, 2010 American Physical Therapy Association. All rights reserved.

*Direct access provisions vary state by state. For specific provisions in your state, visit www.apta.org/advocacy. A direct access map can be found under State Government Affairs/Current Issues.