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NEWS

PHCA Endorses Measure to Expand Practice of Physical Therapist Assistants

HARRISBURG --- Dr. Stuart Shapiro, President and CEO of the Pennsylvania Health Care Association (PHCA), a statewide advocacy group for the commonwealth's most vulnerable older residents as well as their providers of care, today said legislation that would expand the scope of practice for physical therapist assistants would help to increase consumer access to quality care.

The measure (H.B. 1199), sponsored by state Rep. W. Curtis Thomas, reflects an effort to make health-care in Pennsylvania more affordable, widely available and more accessible. The state's 2007-08 fiscal year budget, for example, includes measures to expand the scope of practice of several mid-level health-care providers: dental hygienists, certified registered nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists and nurse midwives.

"Passage of this legislation would allow nursing care facilities, home health centers and newly created assisted living facilities to service their patients at a greater level of efficiency while maintaining a high level of quality," Dr. Shapiro said.

Susan Morey, vice president and general manager of HCR Manor Care's eastern division, testified today on behalf of PHCA at the House Professional Licensure Committee's hearing at the Tucker House Senior Center in Philadelphia. Legislation must be approved by select committees before moving to the full House of Representatives for consideration.

Morey, a licensed and practicing physical therapist with more than 30 years of experience, said the measure would have a positive impact within the health services industry, and especially in long-term care facilities such like nursing homes, where more and more people of all ages are going for rehabilitation after stays in the hospitals.

"Based on my professional experience as a physical therapist, I can state unequivocally that this expansion would enhance access to quality care," Morey said. "Physical therapist assistants are well-trained, certified, responsible professionals who are very capable of exercising effective care through direct as well as indirect physical therapist supervision. We should take advantage of the fullest extent of their educational and practical wisdom."

Currently in Pennsylvania, only a physical therapist can administer any level of physical therapist care in nursing care facilities, home health centers and newly created assisted living facilities, even though a physical therapist assistant is fully qualified to administer effective day-to-day treatment without the physical presence of the therapist. House Bill 1199 does not permit full autonomy of the assistant from the physical therapist, who would still have a supervisory role.

Morey also noted that a majority of states have adopted laws that reflect the relationship between a physical therapist and physical therapist assistant established by the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy's Model Practice Act, which is considered the preeminent standard for physical therapy practices. Within those standards, physical therapist assistants are not restricted to practicing only under the direct on-site supervision of a physical therapist.

Expanding the scope of practice for physical therapist assistants also could create more job opportunities in Pennsylvania. According to the National Institutes of Health Office of Science Education, the occupation of physical therapists and physical therapist assistants is expected to grow much faster than the average for all occupations through 2014.

“This measure benefits consumers, patients and providers,” Morey said.

HCR Manor Care is a leading provider of short-term, post-acute medical care and rehabilitation and long-term skilled nursing care. The company operates more than 275 skilled nursing centers, including 46 in Pennsylvania. HCR Manor Care also operates nine assisted-living facilities in the state, and 14 home health and hospice agencies in Pennsylvania.

PHCA members comprise for-profit, nonprofit and government providers. Overall, PHCA, along with its sister agency, the Center for Assisted Living Management (CALM), represents more than 300 long-term care and senior service providers that care for almost 33,500 elderly and disabled individuals across the state. For more information, visit www.phca.org.

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