

SPRING/SUMMER 2020
VOLUME 27, ISSUE 1

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Alabama Board of Physical Therapy Newsletter

2020 ANNUAL LICENSE RENEWAL

The renewal period for all expiring Alabama PT and PTA licenses will begin on July 1st and will run through October 1st. **All 2019 licenses are expired if not renewed by October 1st!** To verify if your license is due for renewal, you may check date of expiration at the LICENSE VERIFICATION section of our webpage, www.pt.alabama.gov

Annual Renewal Fee

The members of the Alabama Board of Physical Therapy at their June 16, 2020 meeting, voted to reduce annual renewal fees for physical therapists and physical therapist assistants to **\$10** for the 2020 renewal period that begins July 1st and runs through October 1st.

The Board members have a great amount of concern the COVID-19 crisis effect on employment for our licensees here in Alabama. The Board wanted to take immediate and significant action that will benefit therapists still waiting to return to work and others working with salary roll backs, wage and or work hour reductions, probably need assistance. The members hope that this action will help ease some of the financial burdens our licensees face or at least prove not to be an impediment to the successful return to practice in the months ahead.

To review, the standard renewal rate is \$130 for PT's and \$93 for PTA's. Each has an online credit card processing convenience fee of \$5.20 and \$3.72 respectively. Therefore; the usual totals would be \$135.20 and \$96.72. This year its \$10.00 plus .40¢ convenience fee for a total of \$10.40 for your annual renewal.

This is an 89% savings to licensees!

It should be noted that this fee reduction is only available to current licensees. If one is currently expired, they will still have to renew through the expired license and restoration process.

Jurisprudence CE Requirement

Licensees are reminded that this year's continuing education requirement of 2 hours of Alabama Physical Therapy jurisprudence as part of the total 10-hour CE renewal requirement is still in effect. If you have not already obtained your AL Jurisprudence CE's, the Alabama Board of Physical Therapy will have links to continuing education providers on our website. This list is not



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2020 ANNUAL LICENSE RENEWAL

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exclusive, but just a few sources that we have knowledge of providing an acceptable course. Licensees may search for others that provide a course that will meet the requirement. **The requirement for the course is a minimum of two-hour review of the Alabama Physical Therapy Practice Act and Administrative Code.** General physical therapy ethics courses may apply to your other 8 hours of CE required but do not meet the 2-hour AL Jurisprudence requirement. The compliance period for all continuing education covers courses taken from October 1, 2018 to present. *If you were a new graduate, licensed by Examination in the past year, and this is your first renewal, no continuing education is required.*

Once your license renewal transaction is complete, you should receive an email with your confirmation, amount processed, and new year's certificate. If you do not receive the email, visit the **Licensee Online Profile**. Random audits of licensees' continuing education will be conducted for renewals. If you are selected, proof of completion is required at the Board office within 10 business days via fax to 334-242-3288 or email: info@pt.alabama.gov.

Don't delay

Renew today!

www.pt.alabama.gov



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Alabama Board of Physical Therapy Newsletter

Impact of COVID on Physical Therapy

Ellen R. Strunk, PT, MS | Board Member

On January 31, 2020 Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), Alex Azar, declared the COVID-19 outbreak a public health emergency (PHE) in the United States. Meanwhile, Alabamians remained relatively naïve about what the COVID virus was. On February 28, the Alabama Department of Public Health's recommendation for protecting themselves from COVID-19 was to get a flu shot and 'other normal precautions'. On March 13, 2020 President Trump declared the COVID outbreak a national emergency. That same day, Alabama announced its first known case of coronavirus and by the end of the day, there were 6 known cases. Governor Ivey declared a state of emergency and schools were closed.

A lot has happened since March 13, and four months later there is still uncertainty swirling about the virus, including how to contain it and cure it. As a result of the President's declaration of a national emergency and the Secretary of HHS' declaration of a PHE, the Secretary was afforded authority to issue waivers under the Stafford Act¹ to federal programs, such as Medicare, Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). These programs are vital to ensure the needs of individuals in Social Security Act programs are met and that providers who provide these services in good faith can be paid and exempted from sanctions (absent any determination of fraud or abuse).

The practice of physical therapy has not been immune to the pandemic. While some might presume that physical therapists and physical therapist assistants would be needed now more than ever, the reality is that the utilization of physical therapy during the PHE has dropped considerably. Despite the numerous waivers and interim final rules issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) or the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES) package and other bills and grants passed by Congress throughout March and April, more people were becoming infected and even more were scared to seek medical care of any kind.

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Throughout the pandemic, physical therapy services have been treated as “essential services” by federal, state, and local guidance. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released guidelines that noted those who work in a “critical infrastructure industry”, such as health care, have a “special responsibility” to maintain normal work schedules². Despite this, many physical therapists proactively stopped care they determined to be ‘nonessential’ in an effort to flatten the curve of the pandemic.

Between April 24 and May 11, the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) surveyed a representative sample of physical therapists and physical therapist assistants to gauge the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the physical therapy profession. Over 5,400 PTs and 1,100 PTAs responded. The survey included both members and non-members across the spectrum of practice settings and jurisdictions. The results of the sobering report³ were shared and discussed at the June meeting of the Licensure Board. The APTA has granted the Alabama Board of Physical Therapy permission to reprint a couple of the graphs in the report here.

1 <https://www.fema.gov/robert-t-stafford-disaster-relief-and-emergency-assistance-act-public-law-93-288-amended>

2 <https://www.cisa.gov/news/2020/03/19/cisa-releases-guidance-essential-critical-infrastructure-workers-during-covid-19>

3 The full report can be found at: <https://www.apta.org/apta-and-you/news-publications/2020/impact-of-covid-19-on-the-physical-therapy-profession>

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of PTs whose work hours have declined. Private practices and home care have been hit the hardest, with hospital-based outpatient clinics and skilled nursing facilities not far behind. Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of PT and PTA respondents who have seen their income decline. While more than half of PTs saw their income stay the same (54%) or increase (2%), 44% did report a decrease. PTAs were even more affected, with 54% reporting a decrease in income.

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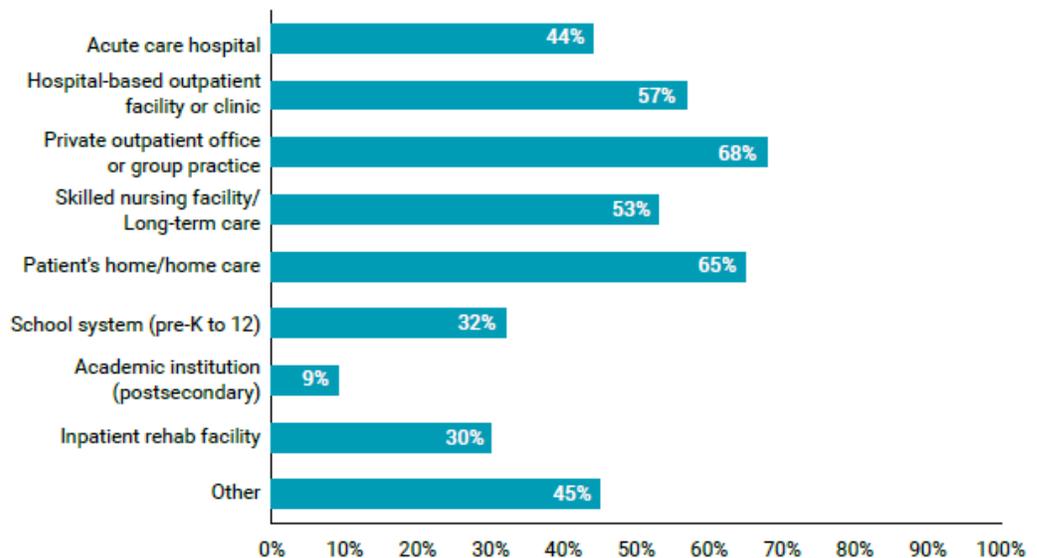
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The survey represents only a snapshot in time. While it is unknown how many respondents were Alabama licensees, the Board anecdotally knows PTs and PTAs in Alabama have been affected by the PHE. Some therapists have had to file for unemployment insurance for the first time in their lives. Other therapists have been asked to manage increasing workloads of very complex patients because they are serving on the front lines of the COVID-19 response. While the reality is that people still need physical therapy services, the stay-at-home orders influenced people's decisions about venturing out of their homes. Even now as those stay-at-home orders are relaxed, many may not seek that care because of fear of contracting the virus.

Figure 1. Percent of PTs Whose Work Hours Declined

Percent of PTs Whose Work Hours Declined



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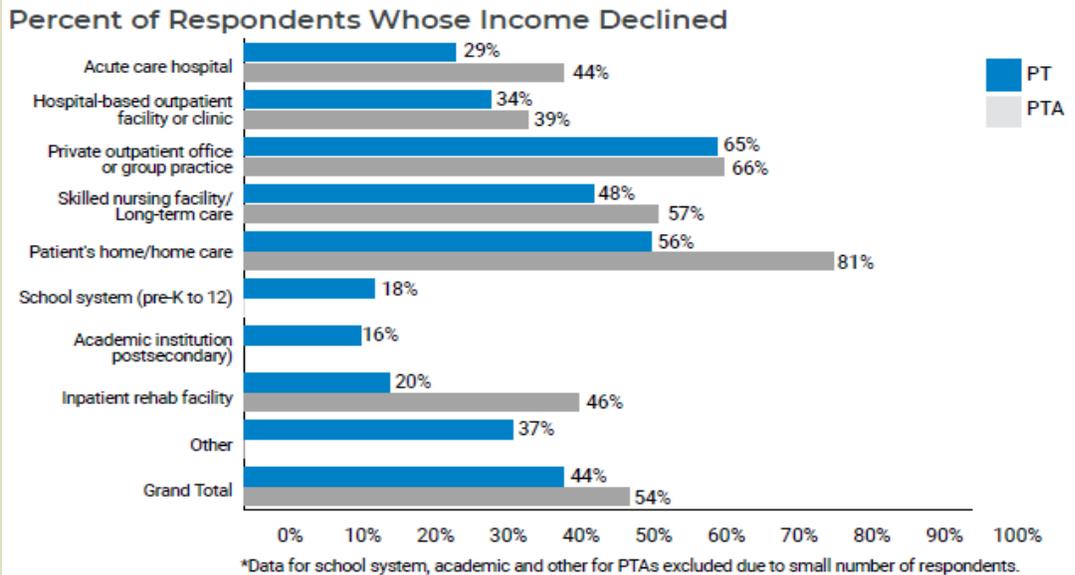
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Impact of COVID on Physical Therapy

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Figure 2. Percent of PTs and PTAs Whose Income Declined



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In closing, physical therapists and physical therapist assistants have been granted the authority to provide telehealth services during the PHE. The Alabama PT Practice Act includes the freedom to use telehealth to deliver necessary services. The utilization of telehealth across the country and in Alabama is still relatively small, but most of that is due to technology challenges and the uncertainty around how to get paid. Now that the ‘telehealth genie’ is out of the bottle, some providers may expand their utilization of this treatment medium. The PHE is scheduled to end on July 24, 2020. Whether it is extended for another 90 days is yet to be seen. The Licensure Board will continue to monitor the circumstances affecting the public’s access to physical therapy services.



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Alabama Board of Physical Therapy Newsletter

Physical Therapy- It's More than Exercises!

Margaret Hemm | Consumer Member



I know that the Coronavirus pandemic and quarantine has affected everyone over the past 12-14 weeks in different ways.

My mother is 92 years old and lives in an independent senior living center that was required to follow the State quarantine mandates of NO VISITATION from family or friends. This was particularly difficult for us as this environment does not have staff other than an activity director and chef/waiters. I am basically mom's caregiver, but I was not allowed to go up to her apartment. Mom was isolated and became depressed after about five weeks. She literally was not eating or drinking anything during this time. She lost weight, was dehydrated, and had given up on living. Mom's physician was hesitant to order home health or physical therapy services due to safety issues and

concerns over spread of Covid-19; however, I persuaded him to get an evaluation. Physical Therapy was ordered immediately, and I am forever grateful to the Physical Therapist and Physical Therapy Assistants who refused to give up on mom and provided her much more than exercises, they kept me informed of her progress, ensured she got lots of hydration, and the attention she needed to literally get back on her feet and thrive.

I am forever grateful that Physical Therapy WAS considered an "essential" service as we continue to fight through this. Physical Therapy is heart and soul.



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Alabama Board of Physical Therapy Newsletter

Joker or Toker?

Wiley Christian, III, PT | Board Chair



The joke may be on you if great care isn't exercised during the use and or distribution of CBD oils and related products. The State of Alabama Board of Physical Therapy has been faced with the challenge of addressing our licensee's personal use and professional distribution of CBD based products. Although it is legal to use and distribute CBD products, drug testing and enforcement polices remain unchanged.

Our board follows the guidelines of the Department of Transportation and recommendations of the Alabama Attorney General's office. According to the Alabama Attorney General's

office CBD oils with less than 0.3% THC is legal in the state of Alabama. The use of properly regulated CBD product should not produce a positive THC result.

CBD Oil is basically the marijuana equivalent to O'Doul's non-alcoholic beer (which still has some alcohol). These products have some THC which is the psychotropic active agent, but not enough to impair judgement or skills. In order to test positive for marijuana one would have to use massive quantities of CBD oil, or use a miss-branded (and therefore illegal) version of this oil. Since the hemp oil market has little to no oversight it's not always possible to know what one is purchasing.

Our wellness provider along with most of our country's PHP's, prohibit the use of CBD oil, Hemp oil and any other cannabinoid product which may produce a positive THC screen result, since there is no way to distinguish THC from CBD or any other source.

Although many employers recognize the benefits of CBD products, most state that positive THC results may result in immediate termination regardless of the source. It is also noted that anyone involved in the sale or distribution of CBD products will be held accountable to all state and federal narcotic laws and internal revenue regulations.

With this in mind, the board recommends extreme caution in the use, sales and or distribution of CBD products to protect the public and professional standing of our licensees.



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Board Member Update

On June 6th, Governor Kay Ivey appointed Vince Molyneux as the PTA Member representing the southern half of the state to the Alabama Board of Physical Therapy. Vince's appointment is for a third, non-consecutive term, having served previously as a past Chairman and Treasurer.

Vince is currently a Sales Executive specializing in healthcare contracts for WaveFly, a reliable Data, VOIP, Cloud, TV, and Managed Services provider for businesses, communities and commercial developments across the Southeast. Vince is a Licensed Physical Therapist Assistant and Certified Clinical Instructor through the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) and currently serves on the PTA Advisory panel at Bishop State Community College in Mobile, AL, where he was also employed as an adjunct professor.



His past professional experience includes serving as a Physical Therapist Assistant and eventually as the Assistant Director/Clinical Coordinator at the Spring Hill Medical Center Outpatient Rehabilitation Center in Mobile, AL over the course of 20 years. Vince has a Bachelor of Science in Health Arts from the University of St. Francis in Joliet, IL as well as an associate degree in Applied Science as a Licensed Physical Therapist Assistant from Bishop State Community College.

Vince proudly served his country in the United States Coast Guard and looks forward to serving the people of Alabama in his new appointment to the Alabama Board of Physical Therapy.

Please join us in welcoming Vince back to the Alabama Board of Physical Therapy.



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Alabama Board of Physical Therapy Newsletter

From a Practitioners View

Jonathan Zecher | Board Member

Certainly, we are experiencing unprecedented times. In my 20 years in practice, I have seen significant changes in the market or the profession on a frequent basis but of course nothing of this magnitude. While, I know the uncertainty can present anxiety and challenges, it also provides opportunity for growth.

Being in a small, private practice, the third week in March set a new precedent for panic as we saw 50% of our clients cancel in one week. The prior Friday afternoon, March 13th, Governor Ivey announced the closing of schools and plans to continue education for the rest of the year through distance learning. We realized things were going to change significantly but I don't think we were prepared for the magnitude. Our management team met over the weekend to plan what we could do to ensure the safety of our clients and our staff. We researched all of the CDC guidelines for healthcare facilities at the time and implemented the use of masks, social distancing, barriers between treatment areas, no individuals in the waiting area, disinfecting of all equipment between every use, handwashing on the part of clients in addition to staff as well as medical grade air purifiers in the facility. We had all of our contingencies in place and communicated with all of our staff and clients, encouraging those at high risk not to come. Business dropped rapidly.

I know many others experienced the same thing and the anxiety and fear that comes with it. Worry about whether you will have a job, whether your business will survive, or whether you will be able to keep your staff employed. Many have experienced the pain of being laid off or furloughed. Supervisors and business owners have had to make hard, difficult decisions about staffing. Businesses have scrambled to study and interpret all of the legislation that has been signed to provide relief as well as all the rule changes that have ensued for weeks following the legislation, seeking to take care of their employees and clients.

At the same time, everyone was scrambling to figure out how to continue providing care to clients and keep them on their plan of care. Especially those who were post-op patients. We saw additional unprecedented moves as, one by one, insurance providers began to accommodate and reimburse telehealth services. While most therapists had not previously provided telehealth services and even clients were unsure what care through telehealth services would look like, therapists worked diligently to make it happen.

While people are returning to therapy, things certainly haven't returned to "normal." Extensive precautions are still just as necessary as they were at the beginning. There are still many who have

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not been able to return to work. For new graduates, there aren't a lot of job opportunities. Employers are hesitant to hire in such uncertain times. And there is a chance at any time that there could be a significant drop in clients and another round of lay-offs or furloughs again.

While it's not over yet. Things are much better than they were 3 months ago. As a profession, we have expanded into telehealth rapidly. Businesses are looking at how to utilize additional technology to improve the delivery of care and value of telehealth. We have even had the opportunity to collaborate with a biomedical company to develop new solutions. Businesses and therapists have been forced to find new ways to engage their clients and provide care. It has forced us out of our comfort zone.

Realistically, the therapy landscape was already moving in this direction. In the current crisis, the changes have just been accelerated. I believe the profession as well as individual therapists and businesses are already stronger as a result of this crisis. And I believe physical therapy will be even stronger before this is over. In the meantime, don't neglect the opportunity to grow and adjust to the needs of the moment. And please don't neglect the opportunity to support and encourage each other through the challenges.

NOTICES

Disciplinary Notices—none to report

Board Meeting Updates—under the Governor's declared State of Emergency, the Alabama Board of Physical Therapy is not conducting in-person meetings. Board meetings are being held via WebEx format. Check our website www.pt.alabama.gov for meeting notices and attendee information.

Although we are meeting via telnet; all meeting are still open to the public.

Stay safe and stay well.



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