



American Physical Therapy Association

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May 5, 2012

Debbie Silkwood-Sherer PT, DHS, HPCS  
President, American Hippotherapy Association  
P.O. Box 2014  
Fort Collins, CO 80522-2014

Dear Dr. Silkwood-Sherer:

On behalf of the American Physical Therapy Association's (APTA) more than 80,000 member physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and students of physical therapy, I am happy to provide a letter to the American Hippotherapy Association on the use of a hippotherapy as a treatment strategy that is an appropriate part of physical therapy practice. Physical therapists' practice in a wide variety of settings and perform evidenced-based screening and evaluation for individuals with neuromuscular, cardiovascular, integumentary, and musculoskeletal conditions and provide interventions that focus on mobility and function to enable an individual's participation and improving their quality of life.

The physical therapy plan of care is based upon an individualized examination and evaluation of the patient to address impairments and functional and participation limitations and environmental barriers. The plan of care consists of the patient's/client's goals and intended outcomes and the treatment strategies and interventions directed to achieve a functional outcome. Hippotherapy is a treatment strategy that when incorporated into the physical therapist plan of care utilizes the equine movement as part of an integrated program to achieve outcomes such as improved balance, strength and flexibility. In cases where a physical therapist treatment plan utilize hippotherapy, the services rendered by that physical therapist, in such a context, should be recognized as physical therapy interventions and not the specific treatment strategy, device, equipment or adjunct used to deliver these interventions. In contrast, therapeutic horseback riding in which the goal is to achieve the skill of riding or other equine-related activities is not considered physical therapy intervention due to it not being a component of the individuals' physical therapy plan of care.

While the 2003 *Guide to Physical Therapist Practice* does not specifically mentioned hippotherapy, it is considered a treatment strategy consistent with interventions of therapeutic exercise. The *Guide* states that therapeutic exercise may include "balance and coordination training; motor function training or retraining; neuromuscular education or re-education; neuromuscular relaxation, inhibition and facilitation; perceptual training; posture awareness training; and sensory training or retraining".

AMERICAN HIPPO THERAPY ASSOCIATION, INC. (AHA, INC.)

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When an individual's physical therapy plan of care includes hippotherapy as a treatment strategy it is appropriate for services to be billed as neuromuscular education, therapeutic exercise, therapeutic activities or sensory integration, depending the intent of the intervention, the patient goals, and assuming all other payer requirements are met.

Thank you and if you need any further information, please feel free to contact APTA's Clinical Practice and Research Department at [practice@apta.org](mailto:practice@apta.org)

Sincerely,

R. Scott Ward, PT, PhD  
President

RSW/jm/mfd



American Physical Therapy Association

April 12, 2000

Barbara Heine, PT, HPCS  
President, American Hippotherapy Association  
5001 Woodside Road  
Woodside, CA 94062

Dear Ms. Heine:

The APTA recognizes that hippotherapy is a treatment tool in which the movement of the horse and related activities are used to address impairments and functional limitations in patients primarily with neuromusculoskeletal dysfunction in order to achieve functional outcomes. Within the 1997 *Guide to Physical Therapist Practice* hippotherapy is not specifically mentioned because it is considered a treatment tool under the specific direct intervention of therapeutic exercise. In this context, therapeutic exercise uses a horse, where the horse should be regarded similar to a piece of equipment and not the treatment itself. The Guide does not mention any particular piece of equipment in its description of therapeutic exercise, but states that therapeutic exercise may include "balance and coordination training; motor function training or retraining; neuromuscular education or re-education; neuromuscular relaxation, inhibition and facilitation; perceptual training; posture awareness training; and sensory training or retraining."

It is appropriate for physical therapy services that include hippotherapy as a treatment tool to be billed as neuromuscular education, therapeutic exercise or therapeutic activities depending on the way in which the horse is used in the treatment session, assuming all other payer requirements are met.

The physical therapist is responsible for designing a plan of care that is based upon an examination and evaluation of the patient. In cases where a physical treatment plan and goals utilize a horse to assist in achieving those goals, the services rendered by that physical therapist, in such a context, should be recognized as physical therapy intervention. It is understood that the use of the horse as a treatment tool should be considered no differently than any other treatment tool applied to other interventions within the scope of physical therapist practice. In contrast, therapeutic horseback riding in which the goal is to achieve the skill of riding or other equine-related activities, is not considered physical therapy intervention.

Sincerely,

Andrew A. Guccione, PT, PhD, FAPTA  
Senior Vice President  
Division of Practice and Research