

Eli's Rehab Report

ADVOCACY: How Spearheading an Independent State Society Could Help Your Practice

Clarification: Most independent PT societies are not competitors of APTA

Although national concerns like therapy caps or the 75 Percent Rule are constantly on your radar, you can't forget about day-to-day issues in your own backyard. If you think your specific rehab sector could use a boost of advocacy and local support, an independent state society might be your best answer.

In fact, some physical therapists have already established successful state societies that cater to specific practice sectors, and two societies TCI interviewed -- state organizations formed specifically for independently practicing physical therapists -- have nothing but good things to say about forming an exclusive group of therapists. The New Jersey Society of Independent Physical Therapists (NJSIPT) and the Oregon Physical Therapists in Independent Practice (OPTIP) are just another step toward making their members' voices heard.

Groups Complement Established Associations

An important clarification about many independent state societies is that they are not out to compete against state or national professional associations. Take for example NJSIPT and OPTIP -- both of these organizations stress that they are complements of APTA and their respective state chapters. "We actually encourage our members to be a part of APTA, and the majority of them are," says **Ken Maily, PT**, of Maily and Inglett Consulting and professional affairs representative of NJSIPT.

The OPTIP agrees. "We work closely with APTA and the Oregon state chapter on a lot of legislative issues," says OPTIP president **David Standifer, PT**.

The exclusive groups thus act as complements, and their position allows for a narrow, single-minded focus, "which an organization like APTA can't have because it represents a more diverse group of members," Maily says. "And that's the only way you can concentrate on one specific agenda."

Example: The NJSIPT has its eye on and is advocating a bill in the New Jersey legislature that would require the medical director of a carrier that offers a managed-care plan or uses a utilization management system in any of its health benefits plans to ensure that the carrier requires no prior authorization for a covered person to access certain healthcare services, including physical and occupational therapy.

Decide on an Organization Type

Another thing to consider if you want to form an organization like NJSIPT or OPTIP in your state is the group's structure and function.

For example, the OPTIP is a statewide trade organization with three elected officials: president, vice president, and treasurer. It also has an executive director -- an attorney who lobbies on the group's behalf and functions as the society's voice at the state level with the licensing board, legislative subcommittees and workers' comp, Standifer says. OPTIP's membership includes PTs, OTs, and SLPs.

Alternative: NJSIPT is for physical therapists only and is a management services organization (MSO). This is a business entity focused on providing certain types of management services to its members, who are shareholders. "This could be scheduling services, billing services, educational services, etc," Maily says. In the case of NJSIPT, the society focuses

mainly on advocacy services, in particular advocating for reimbursement and practice protection issues, he says.

In fact, right now, NJSIPT has its eye on congressional legislation that would expand the definition of those who can perform incident-to physical therapy services. "The society has already written letters of support to APTA's position because we totally agree that only PTs should perform physical therapy," Mailly says.

Bottom line: Insurance, reimbursement and legal issues will not go away with the wave of a magic wand, and the best place to start making a change is from the bottom up. "I would encourage any state to get involved and start a similar organization -- with numbers, we are much more powerful to make change," Standifer says.