

Eli's Rehab Report

Reader Questions: PTs Lending OTs a Hand Could Spell Bad News

Question: We've had situations where our only OT on staff is out, and we have other PTs available. Each time, we haven't had ample time to find a replacement OT, so we're wondering if it's legal and ethical for a PT to see an OT outpatient?

-- Kansas Subscriber

Answer: It is not within a PT's scope of practice to perform occupational therapy, so having one of your PTs fill in for an OT that's out would not be a good idea. Even if the patient needs treatment from a modality that both your PT and OT staff are trained on, the patient is still under an OT plan of care, so the PT could not step in and legally bill for his or her services under an OT plan of care. It may seem picky, but the last thing you want is for your insurance payer to consider your claim as fraudulent billing.

If the same patient has a separate physical therapy plan of care, then the PT can most definitely treat the patient -- under the PT plan of care, that is. Also, if the patient was referred to OT, but you did not have an OT available, contact the referring physician and see if they will change the referral to PT. Remember: If you are short-staffed you can always reschedule the patient, or you could refer the patient to another OT in the area.