

4.7 Spinal Manipulation

Purpose:

Spinal manipulation is a skillful passive movement of a spinal joint beyond its active limit of motion but within the limit of its anatomical integrity. It is a localized high velocity, low amplitude thrust technique. Its purpose is to restore motion and function (definition taken from the document “Competencies Required to Safely Perform Spinal Manipulation as a Physical Therapy Intervention” - April 2000).

Policy:

Spinal manipulation is taught during a physical therapist’s entry-level university education in physical therapy, during post professional education and/or postgraduate education combined with clinical practice. During this education, physical therapists must acquire certain competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) which are required to safely and effectively perform spinal manipulation. The competencies required of physical therapists to perform safe, effective spinal manipulation are outlined in the document: “Competencies Required to Safely Perform Spinal Manipulation as a Physical Therapy Intervention”.

Physical Therapists who practice spinal manipulation as a physical therapy intervention must:

1. Be licensed physical therapists who have undertaken theoretical and clinical education in spinal manipulation as part of either their entry level, post professional and/or postgraduate education.
2. Be qualified and/or credentialed to perform spinal manipulation
3. Possess aptitude, abilities, and skills to competently fulfil the technical requirements of spinal manipulation.
4. Be committed to providing client-centered spinal manipulation interventions.
5. Advise clients on not only what treatment is available, but what is advisable based on risk, benefits and cost.
6. Perform spinal manipulation safely and effectively.
7. Possess problem-solving skills and judgment applicable to complex, unique and uncertain situations related to spinal manipulation.

4.7 Spinal Manipulation

8. Maintain their competence by keeping up to date with best available evidence and by continually building on their specialized body of knowledge with respect to spinal manipulation.
9. Understand the role of spinal manipulation as a component in the continuum of client care.
10. Incorporate best available evidence into their assessment, diagnosis, prognosis, treatment planning, goal setting, intervention and (re)evaluation.
11. Be aware of the potential adverse consequences (e.g. medical and legal) related to the performance of spinal manipulation.

References and Acknowledgment:

The College of Physical Therapists of Alberta for undertaking the project which produced the document “Competencies Required to Safely Perform Spinal Manipulation as a Physical Therapy Intervention”. April 2000

Criteria Approved by the Council:

1. Spinal manipulation taught during entry-level university education, post-professional education and/or post-graduate education, combined with clinical practice.
2. Course content must include, but is not limited to:
 - Theoretical basis of spinal manipulation
 - Safety
 - Indications/contraindications/precautions
 - Relevant anatomy
 - Spinal manipulation as a component in continuum of client care
 - Technique
 - Potential adverse consequences (e.g. medical and legal)

The competencies required of physical therapists to perform safe, effective spinal manipulations are outlined in the document “Competencies Required to Safely Perform Spinal Manipulation as a Physical Therapy Intervention.”