Sexual Misconduct in Physical Therapy Statement

Introduction

As licensed healthcare professionals, patients place significant trust in their physical therapist and physical therapist assistant and may be vulnerable because of the provider's professional authority and role in their care. The Sexual Misconduct and Boundaries Committee recognizes the inherent power imbalance between physical therapy providers and patients. Physical therapy boards increasingly recognize the prevalence of sexual boundary violations and their impact on safe, effective healthcare delivery. Sexual misconduct causes wide-spread lasting harm to individuals, violates patient trust, and professional ethics.

The *Sexual Misconduct in Physical Therapy Statement* provides state boards with a clear, definitive statement regarding sexual misconduct to protect the public and enforce clear professional standards.

While there may be instances of sexual abuse where the provider or a student is the victim, the focus of the statement below is the patient/provider dynamic. Additionally, the issue of non-sexual emotional abuse is not addressed.

This statement is not meant to replace or supplant jurisdictional code, statute, or regulation but to serve as policy and guidance in complementing and enforcing those laws and rules. Member boards and affiliates are permitted and encouraged to use this definition in their own jurisdictional materials, policies, and communications to licensees and the public.

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Sexual behavior between a patient and a provider is never part of diagnosis or treatment. The Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy [or FSBPT member board] takes sexual misconduct seriously. It works to prevent it and to respond appropriately when someone files a complaint.

Sexual misconduct can happen in-person or online, can be spoken or physical, intentional or not, and may include actions, words, messages, or gestures that a patient or the patient's representative could reasonably view as sexual.

Sexual misconduct by a physical therapy provider means sexual behavior that exploits the patient-provider relationship. This misuse of the relationship is what makes it different from appropriate physical therapy care, including sexual health care.

Sexual misconduct is a profound violation of trust, undermining patient safety and dignity, and the therapeutic relationship between the patient and the provider.