



Parking Placards by Physical Therapists: An Emerging Trend in Contemporary Healthcare

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Introduction

In February 2018, the Michigan legislature enacted legislation that affords physical therapists (PT) the same legal authority to determine a person's disability status about parking permits and license plates previously afforded to physicians, physician assistants, and advanced nurse practitioners. The Knollenberg bill was passed by the Michigan House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. This bill allowed PTs the ability to issue handicapped parking permits to eligible patients, extending to PTs the same legal authority to determine a person's disability status regarding parking permits and license plates. This legislation allows PTs in Michigan to legally issue handicapped parking permits to eligible patients. Michigan thus joined Colorado, Kentucky, Louisiana, and Maryland. Minnesota joined the list in 2019 while Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri have added licensed PTs to the list of providers in 2022 [1]. As of today, Alaska, Iowa, North Dakota, and Tennessee have been added to the list making it 12 states to incorporate this legislative trend. It is clearly growing across the United States, and it will be important for those with physical challenges. This event is significant as it is symbolic of the changing dynamics of the provision of services within the United States healthcare system, as well as emblematic of changes seen within the physical therapy profession in recent decades. Michigan PTs report this policy change has streamlined one area of their provision of mobility care and patient advocacy.

Disability is defined by the ADA as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (ada.gov). A person is deemed to have a disability when he or she has a history or record of such an impairment, or when such a person is perceived by others as having such an impairment (ada.gov). Disabilities may include a health condition, personal factors, and/or environmental factors and is diverse. The passage of direct access legislation allows patients to visit a physical therapist (PT)

without the doctor's prescription. After a thorough evaluation, a PT may issue a temporary disability placard while the patient is under their care. Physical therapists are the perfect individuals to issue temporary handicap accessible placards and retrieve them from their patients when they have improved and no longer need the placard or handicapped parking. The American Physical Therapy Association's mission is to build a community that advances the profession of physical therapy to improve the health of society. In 2014, the APTA (American Physical Therapy Association) House of Delegates adopted a position supporting increased consumer access to mobility status certification by advocating for changes in state laws to add physical therapists (PTs) as designated providers able to determine the mobility status of a patient or client for the purposes of disability parking placards or license plates. Supporters of this bill argued that the extensive education of PTs makes them highly trained to detect physical mobility limitations and determine viable solutions. This passed through the Michigan Senate and became Public Act 62 of 2018, and on March 13, 2018 [2]. Governor Rick Snyder signed this legislation that amended the Motor Vehicle Code (MCL 257.19a) by adding PTs to the list of authorized providers for this component of community mobility. The Michigan Vehicle Code (MCL 257.19a) states that persons with a qualifying disability, as determined by a licensed physician, physician's assistant, chiropractor, nurse practitioner, optometrist, or physical therapist, may apply for a disability license plate or placard. To qualify a person must have one or more characteristics which affect a patient's ability to walk.

This legislation is an example of one of many emerging trends in healthcare policy directly impacting physical therapy, detailing the legislative action that recently granted PTs in Michigan and other states throughout the country the legal authority to prescribe disability-related parking placards. In addressing barriers faced by people with disabilities, it's essential to consider various factors such

as attitudinal, physical, communication, and financial hurdles. The World Health Organization emphasizes the importance of achieving disability inclusion [3], with the physical therapy profession playing a significant role in this endeavor. Physical therapists are uniquely positioned to assess and determine the necessity of disability placards for individuals with physical disabilities. By implementing a diligent monitoring system to regulate the issuance and retrieval of temporary placards, the potential for abuse can be significantly reduced. Moreover, advocating for the authorization of physical therapists to issue disability placards in the remaining states is crucial. This expansion would facilitate access to necessary assistance for patients, ultimately contributing to improved disability inclusion and accessibility. Further incite is needed to better understand how PTs may uniquely foster access to contemporary healthcare services, rein in healthcare costs related to patients requiring multiple doctors' visits, and broadly foster social determinants of health.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no commercial or financial associations that might pose a conflict of interest in connection with this submitted manuscript

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