



ASHT Response to Health Care Reform Policy

The American Society of Hand Therapists (ASHT) supports health care reform that improves access, coverage, quality of care and cost effectiveness, without hindering the delivery of care through regulation limits on annual or lifetime benefits or with regard to race, gender, sex, and pre-existing condition. ASHT defends the right of the patient to choose their health care insurance and not have coverage terminated due to a change in health status.

Hand therapists* are the leaders in upper extremity rehabilitation. As a profession, hand therapists provide cost-effective intervention, and improve outcomes through skilled and specialized care³. ASHT seeks to ensure that hand therapy services remain a critical part of health care, including continued support for repeal of the Medicare outpatient therapy caps and expansion of federal and state funded programs to include coverage for hand therapists in all hand and upper extremity treatment settings³.

ASHT supports the reform requirement of rehabilitation and habilitation services in the mandatory benefits package⁵. This change is expected to reduce the amount of therapy denials for a treatment or service that an insurance company deems habilitative rather than rehabilitative⁵. (Habilitation: “the process of supplying a person with the means to develop

maximum independence in activities of daily living through training or treatment⁵.”) Further, ASHT supports the Senate Finance Committee decision that occupational therapists and physical therapists are qualified providers of orthotics and prosthetics for Medicare beneficiaries^{1, 2, 4 and 5}. ASHT promotes the opportunity for hand therapists to move forward into new areas of Medicare coverage including: chronic pain management, coordinated care, and wellness and prevention program^{3,5}.

ASHT recognizes that health care reform will require hand therapists to provide additional clinical research to further substantiate the need for treatment of individuals challenged by upper extremity injuries. ASHT will continue to educate its membership regarding the importance of evidence based practice. ASHT recognizes that evidence-based practice and integration of functional outcome evaluations as essential to providing cost-effective, appropriate and timely patient care.

** Hand Therapists are defined as occupational therapists and/or physical therapists that specialize in rehabilitation and habilitation of the upper limb.*

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Division: Practice Commission

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