

The Sports Physical: Documentation

By Timothy Warren, DC

You're having a busy day in practice when you reach for the next chart. You smile and realize you will not be asking any questions about what caused this condition or if it will go away. You get to perform a pre-participation physical! No documentation to perform, no diagnosis to worry about and no insurance paperwork to complete. You complete the examination and sign the form clearing the student to compete in the sport or the school function. The form is handed back to the student or their parent and you go back to your busy day with patients and paperwork.

Or, you have been asked by a school to help them with a fundraiser by coming to the school to perform pre-participation physicals for their students. So, on the appointed day, you show up and perform the physical as you agreed. The students come through and you perform the physicals, sign the forms and allow the school to collect the forms. You have a wonderful day and the school raises money to help the students and the athletes.

So the question is: are you meeting the standard of care for pre-participation physicals?

According to the Kansas State Board of Healing Arts, these are medical records and must be kept for 10 years. If you sign the school physical form, you must keep a record of it for 10 years. The Kansas State Board of Healing Arts current guideline on this issue is from August 2014:

The purpose of this policy is to describe the Board of Healing Arts' current interpretation of the standard of care for the performance of school physicals and provide guidance to healing arts professionals. The Board adopts this policy in furtherance of its purpose to protect the public.

Authority:
K.S.A. 65-2801

Policy:

The Kansas Board of Healing Arts licenses many health care professionals who perform school physicals as part of their scope of practice. The Board considers school physicals to be a significant and important patient encounter since some students may not have ready access to routine medical care for basic evaluation. The following fundamental elements should be included in ALL school physicals:

- Collection, review, and documentation of entire medical history, including age- appropriate immunizations.
- Review of family history.

- Accurate vital signs obtained and documented, with re-evaluation of any abnormal findings.
- Complete physical examination, with documentation of all remarkable findings.
- Written protocol for referral to student's primary care provider or appropriate specialist, if indicated, for problems or conditions identified during the school physical.
- Creation and retention of a complete medical record documenting all of the above, with a copy provided to the student's primary care provider or, if none exists, to the student's parents or guardians.

The procedure in my office was to have my staff copy the completed pre-participation physicals and file them away into a binder just in case the school lost the physical form or the student needed an extra copy throughout the year. This was as a courtesy to our patients. Then sometime after the school year was complete—usually in late July or early August—we would properly dispose of the outdated physicals forms (those that were one year old) and make way for the coming school year. Since the school physicals are only good for one year, and in my mind “weren’t really medical records,” I thought our procedure was proper. But, as outlined above, I was violating the Kansas State Board of Healing Arts policy.

I have talked to other doctors of all types and most of us are doing the same procedure that my office had been doing. In fact, there have been doctors, physician assistants and nurse practitioners on the practice fields performing these physicals without even so much as a copy being made.

What harm can be done by doing this? The harm is to the patient who might not be able to see a doctor on a regular basis or the physical examination is that young person’s only interaction with a health care provider during that calendar year. The harm is to the athlete that is injured on the field of play with no record of healthcare before that season. The harm is to the student who may develop a condition later that year and needs that baseline physical to determine a pre-existing condition. Since my mistake, I have changed my policy and now retain all of the physicals to meet the requirements of the Kansas State Board of Healing Arts. But most importantly, I have changed my policy to protect my patients and those who have entrusted me with their school physicals.

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