

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## New Law Expands Reach, Elevates Profession of Virgin Islands' Physical Therapists

Business / **Published On October 21, 2014 08:42 AM /**

Cynthia Graham **October 21, 2014**



Physical therapists in the Virgin Islands now have direct access to evaluate and treat patients without first requiring a physician's referral of them, thanks to Act No. 7620 that was signed into law by Gov. de Jongh on July 11.

The new law went into effect on October 9 and allows for treatment without a referral for 45 days or 12 treatment visits. It also includes changes to the licensing law that protects the term "physical therapy" (PT) as an activity exclusively performed by a physical therapist, according to a news release issued by the St. Thomas-based Therapy Works organization.

Other provisions of the law include title protection for "DPT" and "doctor of physical therapy," an updated definition for the practice of physical therapy, an expanded board of physical therapy, and revised qualifications for licensure.

Prior to Act No. 7620's passage, a physician referral was required for all PT services. As a result, physical therapists say many persons requiring their services went untreated because of the added cost and insurance carriage associated with receiving treatment.

American Physical Therapy Association President Paul Rockar, Jr., PT, DPT, MS praised the efforts of local physical therapists who worked over many years to bring about the legislative changes. He said, "Improved patient access to PT services continues to be a high priority for the profession and APTA."

Virgin Islander and APTA member Jerry Smith, PT, DPT, ATC thanked the 30th Legislature, Gov. de Jongh and other stakeholders for helping to bring the law to fruition, stating, "It's been a long time coming, but consumers will now have greater access to quality health care provided by physical therapists."