

Article highlights legal issues linked to physician extenders

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"By following these suggestions, physicians, PEs, and, most importantly, patients will reap the many benefits of PEs' participation in the health care team," according to the article.

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(HealthDay)—The use of physician extenders (PEs; mainly physician assistants and nurse practitioners) may bring added legal risks to a practice, according to an article published in *Medical Economics*.

The role of PEs varies based on the statutory provisions of the state in which they practice. These statutes typically relate to training and licensing requirements, PE to doctor ratios, presence and availability of supervising doctor, and review and cosigning of charts.

According to *Medical Economics*, the increasing use of PEs has not resulted in an increase in [malpractice lawsuits](#) or payouts. However, in the event that a patient is harmed by the actions or inactions of a PE, physicians can be exposed to liability for malpractice even if they were not directly involved in treating the patient. The legal theories that may be applied to attach liability to a physician include negligence in the hiring of a PE, failure to supervise properly, and on the grounds that the PE is acting as an agent for the physician. Three problematic areas in terms of physicians using PEs include failure to have a system in place for working with PEs, lack of effective communication from the [physician](#) to the PE, and avoiding the temptation to give too much autonomy to the PE.

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