

OTs are expected to maintain positive inter-professional relationships that support the best interests of the client. OTs will not discuss with a client the competency, quality of service provided, or methods used by another professional or agency in a disparaging way and without careful consideration of all issues. Through the use of clear and sensitive communication, OTs will assist clients in understanding the service delivery system they are in and any shortfalls between the ideal and available resources.

OTs are responsible for OT services they assign<sup>1</sup> to non-OTs (regulated or non-regulated) or students. OTs must obtain consent from the client when involving non-OTs in the delivery of OT service and should follow the guidelines for assigning of service components to non-registrants.

OTs are responsible for providing supervision of non-OTs who are assigned any aspect of OT service. The OT must ensure monitoring and evaluation of the assigned task(s) on a regular basis to ensure the expected standard of care is maintained.

OTs must not allow the pursuit of financial gain or other personal benefit to interfere with the exercise of sound professional judgement and skill. OTs must abide by the advertising regulations set out by the College. OTs may not initiate contact with individuals believed to need care (e.g. a targeted clinical audience, individualized letter) in an attempt to directly solicit business. Advertising can be distributed generally to the public.

<sup>1</sup> The term assign is used as described in the Practice Guideline: Assigning of Service Components to Non-Registrants. (COTO, 1996)



# PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN A CLIMATE OF MANAGED RESOURCES

*Store at Tab #4 of your Registrant Resource Binder*

## Identifying the Issue

Issues related to fiscal responsibility, balanced budgets and resource management are not new. The extent to which this managed resource environment impacts on the delivery of front line health care services continues to grow. There is clear evidence that a climate of managed resources spans all practice environments. Therapists have reported various examples of how decisions based primarily on management of resources impacts on client care. For example, occupational therapists have expressed concerns regarding their inability to maintain professional autonomy with regard to decisions about client care needs (e.g. amount and type of OT intervention, appropriateness for service). In some cases OTs have indicated that they feel unable to maintain an appropriate standard of care for their clients. For example therapists have described situations where they feel they must “abandon” clients partway through the treatment process, with insufficient follow-up. Therapists have also expressed concern about eligibility criteria that exclude specific populations from some service delivery programs. On the flip side, administrators and supervisors have expressed concern that resources are not utilized efficiently and service delivery decisions are not sufficiently based on evidence. The issues of resource management are real and complex and are understandably a source of concern for health care providers and users.

## College Mandate

The College has a mandate to regulate the practice of the profession and govern members in accordance with the *Regulated Health Professions Act*. Recently the College considered the extent to which the managed resource issues identified above fall within this mandate. Some aspects of the managed resource issues, such as those that impact the standard of client care are consistent with the College mandate. The College clearly has a responsibility to see that clients who are in receipt of occupational therapy service are provided with safe, ethical and quality care, consistent with the standard of practice for the profession. Other aspects of the managed resource issue however, such as equal public access to OT services, are not seen by this College to fall under our mandate and may be more consistent with the mandate of the professional association, in this province, the Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists.

### Defining Responsibilities

The delivery of health care services occurs within a complex system of stakeholders, including governments, organizations, employers, administrators, insurers, health care professionals and the public. Clearly each participant within the system holds some responsibility toward the effective and efficient delivery of services. The College believes that the success of the health care system is dependent on each stakeholder fulfilling their own responsibility and working cooperatively to support each other in this effort. Today's current climate of managed resources results in several challenges for anyone involved in providing or receiving health care services. Occupational therapists, as autonomous health care professionals are no exception. Despite these challenges, the College expects OTs to maintain standards of practice once service delivery commences. The information below is provided as a summary of the key responsibilities that all occupational therapists have toward their clients. The College expects occupational therapists to carry out these responsibilities and supports therapists in articulating these expectations to decision-makers within the health care system.

### Responsibilities of Occupational Therapists

*Within a managed resource environment, the following responsibilities can be very challenging to uphold. The following list, while applicable to all OT practice, includes examples that are particularly relevant within this environment.*

OTs are expected to follow a systematic approach to service delivery in keeping with the standards of the profession and as defined in the *Essential Competencies of Practice for Occupational Therapists in Canada: 3rd Edition* (ACOTRO, 2011).

OTs are expected to serve the best interests of their client(s). While there may be many stakeholders involved with the care of a client, the client is defined by this College as the individual whose occupational performance issues have resulted in a referral for occupational therapy service. Most often the client is the direct recipient of occupational therapy service. The requestor, referral source or payer of the service is not defined as the client and while these individuals play an important role within service delivery, their interests are secondary to those of the client. OTs need to establish and fulfill contractual agreements with stakeholders in a manner that respects the rights of the client.

OTs are expected to uphold the principle of transparent practice. An OT must respect the client's right to know the nature of services being provided, initially and on an ongoing basis. Open and honest communication is expected to promote realistic client expectations. The College recommends that at or before the initial meeting, at least the following information has been communicated to the client:

- The purpose of the service to be provided
- A realistic scope of deliverable services
- The potential benefits, material risks and limitations of the OT service and where appropriate, the choice of the client to refuse the service
- The payer of the service and context of the referral

- The process for collecting, using, sharing and storing personal information
- The accountability of the OT to the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario, as appropriate

OTs are expected to follow the principle of informed consent with respect to all occupational therapy services provided to the client. Clients must be provided with appropriate information in order to support the values of client choice and client-centred practice.

OTs are expected to provide services appropriate to the client's needs and must not discontinue services without an acceptable reason or having made reasonable arrangements in consultation with, and agreeable to the client for the continuation of care. For example it is considered appropriate to discontinue service if the allocated resources have been exhausted (*Professional Misconduct Regulation*, section 9).

OTs have an obligation to provide clients with a clear understanding of their current treatment status if resources are exhausted prior to expected discharge. Clients should be advised of alternative services and offered choice of provider. For example, clients may be advised of the OT's own availability as a service provider, if it is included with a list of potential service providers. Therapists should note however, that these situations may introduce potential conflict of interest concerns that need to be addressed with transparency. Areas to be addressed may include that: other stakeholders, such as the OT's employer, may need to know of this offer, the client needs to be aware that there will be no repercussions from choosing another service provider and no pressure or undue influence can be exerted.

When service is to continue with another provider (OT or otherwise) the OT should take the necessary steps to ensure safe and continuous care, within the boundaries of client consent. For example, if equipment has been provided to a client, some follow-up mechanism is expected.

OTs have a responsibility to make the client and referral source aware of any restrictions being placed on the OT service, and to make suitable recommendations when the most appropriate services for a client are not available from the funding source.

OTs should maintain clinical records according to College guidelines. They also have a responsibility to ensure the integrity of the record and of any opinions or recommendations reflected in it. In the event the organization/agency the OT is providing service to, ceases to operate, the OT is expected to take reasonable steps to ensure the preservation, security and ongoing access to the client record.

OTs are expected to ensure that financial records are maintained for every client to whom a fee is charged. These records should be maintained according to the College guideline. OTs also have an obligation to understand the fees and billing practices for their service, whether or not they have responsibility for establishing them (*Professional Misconduct Regulation*).

OTs are expected to ensure equipment used for the delivery of OT service is safe and in reliable working order. Service records for any equipment used to examine, treat or render service to clients should be maintained according to the College guideline.