



QUALITY ASSURANCE PROGRAMS AN INTRODUCTION

Store at Tab 5 of your Registrant Resource Binder

The College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario's Quality Assurance Program is founded on two concepts. First, that occupational therapists (OTs) in Ontario are competent practitioners who continually upgrade their knowledge and skills to meet the demands of changing practice environments and client needs. Second, that the public expects OTs, as accountable health care professionals, to demonstrate that they maintain their competence. The Quality Assurance (QA) Program is aimed at promoting reflective practice and providing tools and resources for OTs to continue to enhance their knowledge and skills. It is also designed to ensure that Registrants can and do, demonstrate continued competence.

The Quality Assurance tools are based on the established essential competencies published in the Essential Competencies of Practice for Occupational Therapists of Canada, 2nd edition.

The College's responsibility for Quality Assurance and Continuing Competencies

Under the *Regulated Health Professions Act* (RHPA, 1991), and the *Occupational Therapy Act* (1991), the profession of occupational therapy (along with 23 other health care professions) was regulated for the express purpose of protecting the public.

All Colleges under the RHPA must develop, establish and maintain:

- standards of practice to assure quality of practice of the profession; and
- programs to promote continuing competence among its members.

Colleges were mandated to achieve these goals by establishing a quality assurance program for all Registrants and reporting on its outcomes. The College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario's Quality Assurance Program is an important aspect of the College mandate.

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The Quality Assurance Program mandate

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care set legislation for the quality assurance programs of all health care colleges. A quality assurance program must include:

- (a) continuing education or professional development designed to,
 - (i) promote continuing competence and continuing quality improvement among the members,
 - (ii) address changes in practice environment,
 - (iii) incorporate standards of practice, advances in technology, changes made to entry to practice competencies and other relevant issues in the discretion of the council;
- (b) self, peer and practice assessments, and
- (c) a mechanism for the college to monitor members' participation in, and compliance with the quality assurance program.

The purpose of the College's QA Program is to protect the public. To accomplish this goal, components of the program are designed to:

- assist all Registrants in maintaining and improving professional competence;
- identify when an individual Registrant's competence falls below the essential competencies for the profession; and
- assist these Registrants in improving competence to an acceptable level.

The Quality Assurance Program Philosophy

The QA Program is founded on the assumption that each Registrant is a competent practitioner who is motivated to maintain and improve their level of competence.

The Quality Assurance Program Design

Each component of the Quality Assurance Program is based on two main considerations.

First, the College mandate is to protect the public. The QA Program should contribute to ensuring and demonstrating that practitioners are consciously competent and provide safe, ethical and effective service to clients.

Second, the QA Program should be appropriate and useful for Registrants who are:

- motivated adult learners – the program is designed on principles of adult learning;
- self-directed learners – the program consists of a variety of tools, some of which can be completed in an individualized manner; and
- reflective about their own practice – throughout the program, there are opportunities to assess your individual practice and receive feedback.

The Quality Assurance Program has been designed to reflect, ensure and demonstrate that OTs are consciously competent practitioners.

Components of the Quality Assurance Program

The QA Program consists of four main components: Continuing Competency, Program Communication and Education, Program Promotion, and Program Research and Reporting.

Continuing Competency is the most relevant component to the OT. It consists of three separate phases:

1. **Competency Enhancement:** all OTs will participate annually in Competency Enhancement.
2. **Competency Review and Evaluation:** randomly selected OTs will participate in Competency Review and Evaluation. In addition, the QA Committee may direct aspects of the Competency Review and Evaluation process under conditions specified in regulation. Each Registrant should expect to participate in these processes over time.
3. **Competency Improvement:** only those OTs who need assistance to develop and demonstrate the essential competencies will participate in Competency Improvement.

Competency Enhancement

Competency Enhancement includes a variety of tools to assist OTs in enhancing and demonstrating continuing competence. The College provides the following tools:

- **Professional Portfolio**
- **Self-Assessment Tool**
- **Professional Development Plan**
- **Prescribed Regulatory Education Program (PREP)**

In addition to these tools, OTs may also choose to use additional resources to support continuing competency and self-assessment. Please store additional material in the Professional Portfolio binder.

Professional Portfolio

The Professional Portfolio is a tool to help OTs reflect on professional practice and demonstrate participation in continuing competency and professional development. OTs use the process of developing a portfolio to engage in self-evaluation and store relevant material that demonstrates participation in Competency Enhancement. The portfolio consists of a binder and guidelines. The materials stored in the binder should be meaningful to the OT and her/his continued learning, and must include the three mandatory tools.

Mandatory tools

1. **Self-Assessment Tool** – a process to promote self-reflection of competence, relative to the essential competencies of practice. The Self-Assessment Tool is completed every two years. An OT would also complete a Self-Assessment Tool if there has been a major change in her/his practice.
2. **Professional Development Plan** – a plan in which an OT documents her/his learning goals, activities and results of the learning. This tool is completed annually.
3. **Prescribed Regulatory Education Program (PREP) Modules** – self-directed learning modules that help OTs ensure they are up-to-date on the key issues and practices of the profession.

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The PREP Module is distributed to OTs yearly. The Self-Assessment Tool and the Professional Development Plan are available on the College website www.coto.org. The Professional Development Plan and Self-Assessment Tool are typically completed between May and June.

OTs are required to retain copies of their completed PREP Modules, PREP Answer booklet, Self-Assessment Tools and Professional Development Plans in the Professional Portfolio for a period of five years. When OTs declare on the Annual Registration form that they have participated in the QA Program, they are indicating that they have completed the mandatory tools for the past registration year. When an OT is required to participate in Competency Review and Evaluation, the OT will submit the mandatory tools to the College to confirm completion and full participation in the yearly QA Program requirements.

Competency Review and Evaluation

Competency Review and Evaluation is a two-step process which provides feedback to selected Registrants to encourage practice improvements. This process monitors compliance with the QA Program's mandatory requirements and assesses the knowledge, skill, and judgment of the OTs selected.

Each year, a number of OTs are randomly selected to participate in the process. OTs may also be required to participate in Competency Review and Evaluation when directed by the QA Committee. Throughout the Competency Review and Evaluation process, the QA Committee may require an OT to engage in one or more of the assessment tools from both Step 1 and Step 2.

COMPETENCY REVIEW AND EVALUATION

STEP 1

Portfolio review

When an OT is required to participate in the Competency Review and Evaluation process, she/he will submit copies of the mandatory Competency Enhancement Tools from her/his Professional Portfolio from the previous five years. The College will review the submitted materials to confirm an OT's full participation in Competency Enhancement.

Multi-source feedback surveys

In addition to submitting a Professional Portfolio, OTs will also engage in a multi-source feedback survey process. This process involves peers, co-workers and clients completing a practice feedback survey designed to collect information on the OT's practice with respect to client care. The survey will also provide formative feedback to the OT in regards to the essential competencies listed in the *Essential Competencies for Occupational Therapists in Canada* (2nd edition), and the standards of practice. Following successful completion of Step 1, most OTs will return to ongoing Competency Enhancement activities.

STEP 2

Peer and practice assessment

The College may identify that some OTs require a more detailed Competency Evaluation. Step 2 involves an in-depth assessment by a peer assessor of a Registrant's knowledge, skill and judgment in comparison with the standards of the profession. The peer assessor engages the OT in a chart review and behaviour-based interview. In advance of the assessment, the OT completes a pre-questionnaire which provides general information about the OT's practice and role and gauges the Registrant's knowledge of specific College standards. Following the assessment, the peer assessor provides a report to the OT and the QA Committee describing the OT's practice, identifying areas of strengths and areas for learning. The QA Committee determines whether the OT's practice demonstrates continued competence and meets the essential competencies and standards of practice. If practice concerns and/or learning needs are identified, the QA Committee may recommend continuing competency activities or require the OT to engage in Competency Improvement, a QA component where specific remedial activities are directed.

COMPETENCY IMPROVEMENT

For those Registrants whose competence is identified as falling below acceptable standards for the profession, there will be opportunities to improve competency through remediation programs. Such programs and resources will be individually tailored to the Registrant's learning needs.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

In this component of the program, the College collects and uses aggregate data (not individual information) to identify trends in practice areas of learning needs for Registrants as a whole and areas where the public may be at risk. The information is used to evaluate the effectiveness of the QA Program in meeting established goals, and to guide the future development of the QA Program and other related College activities. Aggregate information is also useful in demonstrating improvements to the overall provision of OT services to the public. Stakeholders may also benefit from some of the aggregated information. The answers submitted on the PREP Module Response Sheet are examples of aggregated data collected by the College.

TOOL AND PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

The QA Program includes this component to ensure the ongoing evaluation and development of tools and processes to meet program goals and objectives. Registrants can expect to see continuous changes to the QA Program based on feedback received from participating OTs and ongoing learning and development.

Who has access to the information in the Quality Assurance files?

All activities undertaken as part of the QA Program are conducted in strict confidence. It is critical that Registrants are able to complete the QA Program with honesty and openness. The security and confidentiality of any information shared with the College is an integral part of establishing this frank communication.

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The RHPA specifies that the College cannot use information about an individual Registrant gathered during the QA process in other College programs or committees. In addition, the College will not notify employers when a Registrant has been identified for Competency Review and Evaluation or Competency Improvement.

However, a Registrant is responsible to advise her/his employer about QA processes when necessary, based on the practice environment. Employers will not receive any information from the College about the outcomes of a Competency Review and Evaluation or Competency Improvement process.



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