

Supervision of Student Occupational Therapists

PRACTICE GUIDELINE

College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario

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As one component of their responsibility and commitment to the profession of occupational therapy, occupational therapists actively participate in the education of student occupational therapists through fieldwork supervision. In the interest of the public, as well as the profession, the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario supports occupational therapists as student supervisors and emphasizes their continuing accountability in this role for safe and ethical practice. In assuming the role of student supervisor it is expected that responsibility to the client will be paramount when facilitating student learning.

In supervising students, occupational therapists may assign components of their service delivery to the student. The practice of assigning is defined as allocating responsibility for the delivery of particular aspects of practice, aspects which are not controlled acts as defined in the *Regulated Health Professions Act*, to a non-registrant. Controlled acts that have been delegated to an occupational therapist may be completed by a student. Students are exempt from the RHPA provisions related to controlled acts.

Guideline Goals:

1. To clarify the accountability of an occupational therapist in student supervision.
2. To ensure the delivery of safe, ethical, and quality occupational therapy services within a student learning environment.
3. To clarify the potential impact of unethical conduct by a student occupational therapist with respect to future registration as a regulated health professional in Ontario.

Guideline On Student Supervision

An occupational therapist will:

- 1.0 Base the decision to supervise a student(s) on the therapist's current level of knowledge and skill. It is recommended that an occupational therapist be a general practising registrant of the College and have at least one year of work experience prior to assuming the role of a student supervisor.
- 2.0 Be familiar with the student's educational curriculum, including the program's philosophy and expectations.
- 3.0 Be aware of the student's progress by questioning the student about:
 - (a) the student's level of completion of the specific curriculum;
 - (b) the student's current learning needs; previous clinical experiences; perceived weaknesses, and apparent strengths, and
 - (c) information on any other issues which may assist in ensuring a learning process that promotes a safe, ethical, and quality practice.
- 4.0 Familiarize the student with the agency, the client caseload/workload, and each assigned client/task.

Store at Tab #4 of your
Resource Binder



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- 5.0 Design, with the student, a learning process appropriate to the student's level of knowledge, skills and abilities; governed by a cycle of observation, instruction, evaluation and feedback in keeping with their current level of education. It is recommended that the expectations and indicators of successful performance for the placement be in writing.
- 6.0 Obtain consent from a client when involving the student in the occupational therapy process.
- 7.0 Provide direct supervision to the student who is completing a controlled act which has been delegated to the therapist. The therapist must be physically present and observe the performance of the procedure by the student.
- 8.0 Identify student performance issues, and take appropriate action leading to a resolution of the situation.
- 9.0 Ensure the interests of the client and the provision of safe, ethical and quality practice are not compromised by providing student supervision.

Title

An occupational therapy student, under the supervision of an occupational therapist, must only use the title "Student Occupational Therapist"; or "Student O.T.", to clearly identify their student status. This title is to be used on a name tag, in record keeping, on written projects, etc.

Public Complaints

When a complaint is received by the College about the conduct and/or practice of a student, the supervision of that student by the registered occupational therapist will automatically be investigated.

The occupational therapist is accountable to the College for the supervision of the student's practice within the guidelines as outlined above.

As student occupational therapists are not registered with the College, the complainant will also be referred, by the College, to the appropriate University, where a review of the student's performance and conduct can be appropriately addressed.

Information related to unethical conduct of a student will be investigated and a report held on file for the purpose of review at future registration with the College. An applicant with previous information on file will be provided an opportunity to respond to the College at the time of registration when a Panel will review the application.

Registrants are accountable for the practise they provide to the public. Guidelines are issued by the College for the assistance of the professional. They represent guidance from the College on how members should practice. Guidelines are intended to support, not replace, the exercise of professional judgement by therapists in particular situations.

Backgrounder

RATIONALE

Occupational therapists are actively involved in the supervision of students in a variety of settings. It is important that therapists recognize their accountability to their client(s) and to the College in their role as student supervisors. The needs of the client are paramount in this relationship and must be considered in all decisions made relating to responsibilities assigned to the student. Therapists are expected to request from and be apprised directly by students about learning needs and educational program expectations. This may include gathering information on gaps in learning; individual strengths and weaknesses; and/or individual health concerns relevant to the practice placement. Therapists must consider the balance between the student's skills and their learning needs to ensure an optimum safe learning environment for the student and safety for the client. Therapists are responsible for determining the amount of supervision and direction they provide the student using professional judgment.

Occupational therapists are accountable to the College for supervision and the assignment of tasks to students. The appropriateness of the supervision provided by the occupational therapist will be investigated upon receipt of a complaint related to a student.

All complaints received about students will be referred to the director of the respective University program. Complaints which involve unethical conduct by the student (e.g., theft; abuse behaviour) will be kept on file at the College, and investigated and reviewed at the time the individual is applying for registration. The applicant will be provided an opportunity to respond to the concern at that time, and all relevant information will be reviewed by a panel of the Registration Committee. Consequences of the review range from proceeding with registration; registering with terms and conditions (e.g., supervision; a Quality Assurance review in six (6) months, etc.); or denial of registration. An applicant has the right to appeal decisions.

Clarifying Questions

Q. Does this guidelines apply to Ontario students only?

A. This guidelines applies to any Ontario occupational therapist who assumes the role of student supervisor. The accountabilities are not specific to the geographic location of the student's educational program.

Q. Do I co-sign student notes on the health record?

A. Specific record keeping practices related to students should be clarified by employer policy.

Q. Is verbal or written consent required prior to a student becoming involved with a client?

A. Verbal consent is sufficient, however, the larger issue is whether the consent is an informed choice of the client. A client reserves the right to say no.

Q. If I have a student complete a controlled act (e.g., splinting an unhealed fracture), should I inform the delegator?

A. Yes. The occupational therapist should inform the delegator that he/she would like the student to perform the task. The delegator may or may not support the occupational therapist's decision, and can opt not to delegate the task.

Q. I see the use of the title "O.T. student" most frequently - can this not be maintained?

A. The position of the College is that the title be "Student Occupational Therapist". The "student" portion of the title should be first and foremost to ensure a well informed public.

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