

Telehealth

*Information for
Consumers of Occupational
Therapy Telehealth Services*



*College of Occupational
Therapists of Ontario*

TELEHEALTH

Information for Consumers of Occupational Therapy Telehealth Services

More and more, health care will be given and received through modern technology, communications and telehealth services. This brochure talks about health care being provided by occupational therapists in this new way.

What is telehealth?

Telehealth involves the use of technology to learn and talk about your health at a distance.

- You can use it to find health information.
- People who work in the health field can use it to exchange information, teach and learn, or treat and care for patients.
- People who work in the health field can use it to discuss your care or treatment among themselves.

What can telehealth include?

Telehealth can mean getting general health information or specific health advice. Remember that general information might not apply to you, and when you only talk over the phone or communicate through the Internet, you do not get to know your therapist. Face-to-face meetings are better. Any telehealth activity that you use should be added to the care that you get in person. However, you might be too far away or too ill to visit, or need to talk to someone outside office hours. You can use telehealth to get extra information when you need it.

One kind of telehealth is when you call a general number and speak to a health care provider. This is a growing area and is quite popular in nursing. In fact, the Ontario government recently started a telehealth network for non-emergency health advice.

What should a therapist tell me?

The therapist should tell you

- their name
- their area of practice
- their training or education
- their work address
- the province or state in which they are registered to practice
- the name, location, and phone number of their College or regulatory body
- whether they charge a fee
- any conflicts of interest, such as making money on treatments that they recommend

If the therapist does not tell you these things, ask. If they don't want to answer your questions, think about going to someone who will.

What does it mean if a therapist is regulated?

When an occupational therapist is regulated in Ontario, they follow the rules of a regulatory body called a “College” and their practice must meet certain standards. People call this *regulated, certified, registered, or licensed*.

Regulatory Colleges protect the public from harm, promote good care, and make sure that therapists are accountable to the public. In Canada and in most of the United States, a person must be registered to call themselves an occupational therapist.

If you deal with a registered therapist, you can complain about their practice to their College. They must follow the laws and standards for their profession or face penalties.

Regulatory bodies make sure that their professionals meet the standards for joining the profession and keep up those standards in their work. Unregulated professionals might be trained, but they are not accountable to a College. They have fewer if any penalties for not following laws and standards.

How can I know that a therapist is qualified?

In Ontario, all occupational therapists must meet certain standards before they can practice. Standards might be different in other provinces and countries, or there might be no standards. You might wish to check your therapist’s credentials. If they are regulated, you can make sure they are registered with their College. You can ask them how to contact their College, or you can call us for help in locating contact information (see the end of this brochure). If they are registered in Ontario, we will be able to provide you with information about the therapist.

What if I have a complaint?

If you have a complaint about an occupational therapist who is registered in Ontario, you can get in touch with us (see back of brochure). If the therapist does not belong to a regulatory body, you can complain their employer, the Better Business Bureau, or the local police.

Before dealing with a therapist, ask where they are and where they are registered to practice. It can be hard to know where their practice is if you are talking over the Internet or over the phone.

What else should a therapist tell me?

The therapist should be willing to talk to you about these things:

- what fees they will get for giving you any services or if it will cost you money.
- any facts that might affect the way they serve you (for example, if they get paid to send you to a certain clinic)
- what their health advice implies for you. Are there any side effects? How long might it take to see results?
- whether any special equipment that is used is of good quality and produces good quality output. If the therapist recommends equipment, ask about the origins of the equipment and how well it is made.

The therapist must also ask for your consent. In other words, they must tell you how they expect the advice / treatment to affect you; and you then tell them that you want to continue with this.

It's important that you can talk with each other and be open, honest, and supportive.

Should I give out my personal health information?

When you do not meet face-to-face, you might worry about whether your information is kept safe and private. For privacy, you want a Web site to have a secure connection. There is no way for you to check how secure a Web site really is, and often you can't really tell whom you are talking to, where they are, or their training. The therapist needs to have enough information to help you; but there might be some risks in giving out that information.

A therapist who is registered has strict rules about keeping information private and confidential. They must always obey these rules. These rules apply to any dealings with you or others, whether face-to-face or at a distance.

If the therapist is registered in Ontario and paid by OHIP, they might ask for your OHIP number. Be careful about giving out your number, just as you would a credit card number. There is always the risk that someone could use your OHIP number for other people or to bill for services you don't receive. Again, make sure that they are who and where they say that they are.

Can I use a telehealth service without giving my name?

If you just want general information, you might be able to use the service without giving your name. People who provide health care must keep proper records of their services, so you might have to give your name. You can ask about the therapist's privacy policy.

How much will it cost to use a telehealth service?

Some telehealth services are free, while others charge a fee. If you are phoning, some of the fees might be per minute or per call. You should ask for this information at the start so that you can decide if you would like to continue with the meeting.

Some “area codes”, such as 1-900, are for pay-per-call services. When you dial the number, a charge is added to your phone bill. You might be charged by the minute as well. If you are not sure, you can call the operator to ask if this is an area code or a pay-per-call number.

Summary of key points

- Find out where the therapist is and whether they are qualified.
- You can ask the occupational therapist their name, area of practice, training, work address, how to contact their College or regulatory body, if they have conflicts of interest, and how much the services will cost.
- Try to check whether what you are told is reliable. You can ask your doctor or other health care provider.
- General information might not apply to you.
- Make sure you understand what the treatment advice means for you.
- You must be asked for and give your consent for treatment.
- It might be easier to file a complaint against a regulated therapist than an unregulated one.
- You might be asked to give your OHIP number – be careful.
- The Internet is not guaranteed to be secure. Sometimes, others might be able to read your information.

How to contact us



College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario
10 Bay Street, Suite 340
Toronto, Ontario
M5J 2R8
416-214-1177 or 1 (800) 890-6570
Web site: www.coto.org

Acknowledgement: The College wishes to thank the members of the Telepractice Working Group of the Federation of Health Regulatory Colleges of Ontario for their contributions to this document.

Aussi disponible en français.

Credible
Competent
Committed



College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario

20 Bay Street, Suite 900
Toronto, Ontario, M5J 2N8
Phone 416-214-1177
Toll Free: 1 (800) 890-6570
Fax 416-214-1173
info@coto.org www.coto.org