



PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITHIN A CLIMATE OF MANAGED RESOURCES

Store at Tab #4 of your Registrant Resource Binder

Identifying the Issue

The delivery of health care services occurs within a complex system of stakeholders, including government, organizations, employers, administrators, insurers, health care professionals and the public. Decisions on which services to fund are made at administrative levels, which are not usually within the clinical occupational therapist's span of control. However, OTs can be greatly affected by these decisions. It is important to recognize that working in a climate of managed resources does not preclude the expectation that OTs will work within the standards of the profession.

The health care environment, which includes issues related to fiscal responsibility, balanced budgets and resource management, present an ongoing challenge to health care workers and clients. The extent to which this managed resource environment impacts the delivery of health care services continues to grow. This climate of managed resources spans all practice environments. Therapists have reported various examples of how decisions based primarily on management of resources impacts 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 due to restrictions in the number of visits allowed. Therapists have also expressed concern about eligibility criteria that exclude specific populations from some service delivery programs. Conversely, 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 clients.

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*. The College has considered the extent to which the managed resource issues identified above fall within this mandate. Some, but not all, 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 standards of practice for the profession. Other aspects of the managed resource issue however, such as equal or increased public access to OT services, are not seen by the College to fall under its mandate and may be more consistent with the mandate of the professional association (i.e., the Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists or the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists).

Defining Responsibilities

Each health care professional within the system holds some responsibility regarding 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 and collaboratively to support each other in this effort. In a climate of managed

resources, challenges exist 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. It may be prudent for OTs to be prepared to engage collaboratively with other service providers in pro-active strategies to manage their resources.

Appendix 1 describes some strategies which can be utilized by the OT dealing with managed resources and constraints in funding of OT services.

The information in the next section is provided as a summary of some key responsibilities of all occupational therapists in regards to their clients.

Responsibilities of Occupational Therapists

The College expects occupational therapists to carry out these responsibilities and supports occupational therapists in articulating these expectations to decision-makers within the health care system.

However, it is recognized that the following responsibilities can be very challenging to uphold within a managed resource environment. The following is applicable to all occupational therapy practice.

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*.

OTs are expected to serve the best interests of their client(s). While there may be a number of 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. This is particularly relevant in situations where the amount of OT services are under constraint, and where the client and/or the family may have expectations which cannot be met under the constraint. In the *Standards for OT Assessments*, 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 which includes the anticipated duration, frequency and intensity of service available.
- 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 client's right to privacy and confidentiality in the process of collecting, using, and sharing personal health information as defined in the *Standards for Record Keeping* and the *Personal Health Information and Protection Act*, (PHIPA).
- The accountability of the OT to the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario, as appropriate.

Consent

OTs are expected to follow the legislation and *Standards for Consent* with respect to all occupational therapy services provided to the client. Clients must be provided with appropriate information in order to support the principles of client choice and client-centred practice. In a managed care environment, the assessment and treatment duration of care should be clarified within the consent process, if possible.

Discontinuation of Service

OTs are expected to provide services appropriate to the client's needs and should not discontinue services without an acceptable reason or having made reasonable arrangements, for the continuation of care in collaboration with the client. However, it is considered appropriate to discontinue service if the allocated resources have been exhausted.

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 choices of provider options. When service is to continue with another provider (OT or otherwise), the OT should take the necessary steps to ensure safe and continuous care with the client's involvement if possible. For example, if equipment has been provided to a client, some follow-up mechanism is desirable. If the number of visits has been limited so that a follow-up visit is not supported by the organization, the organization may agree to a follow-up call or some other mechanism that facilitates the safety of the client and the effectiveness of the equipment.

OTs have a responsibility to make the client and referral source aware of the current service model in terms of the amount of service ie: time and number of visits and to make suitable recommendations when the most appropriate services for a client are not available from the funding source.

Record Keeping

OTs are required to maintain clinical records according to the PHIPA, and the College's *Standards for Record Keeping*. If the OT is also the Health Information Custodian of the record, there is also a responsibility to ensure the integrity of the record and of any opinions or recommendations reflected in it. In the event the organization/ agency within which the OT is providing (or has provided) service, ceases to operate, the OT, as the Health Information Custodian, 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 standards. OTs also have an obligation to understand the fees and billing practices for their service, whether or not they have responsibility for establishing them. 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 standards.

Professional Behaviour, Collaboration and Communication

When delivering services, OTs are expected to maintain positive inter-professional relationships that support the best interests of the client. Developing intervention strategies and working with other team members in creating new service models whereby there is a more collaborative approach to client service delivery may assist with utilizing staff resources more efficiently, without compromising effectiveness.

Discretion and professionalism is expected when OTs communicate to clients any restrictions or limitations to funding or services. Through the use of clear and sensitive communication, OTs will assist clients in understanding their current service delivery system, and any shortfalls and limitations between the expectations of the client and available resources.

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. OTs should be mindful of perceived or actual conflict of interest and should 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.

Support Personnel

OTs are responsible for OT services they assign to support personnel or students. Moving additional tasks to the support personnel may be a greater expectation when OT resources are limited. In compliance with the *Standards for the Supervision of Support Personnel*, OTs should obtain consent from the client when involving support personnel in the delivery of OT service.

OTs are responsible for providing supervision of support personnel who are assigned any aspect of OT service. When OT resources are limited, the Occupational Therapist may be required to supervise additional support personnel, making it prudent to evaluate and modify the supervision model used.

The OT should ensure that monitoring and evaluation of the assigned task(s) take place on a regular basis to ensure the expected standard of care is maintained.

Increasing the utilization of support personnel in occupational therapy services may be a strategy for increasing the span of OT Services. OTs may develop such a model as a strategy to provide additional services to clients.

Appendix 1

Strategies for Managing within Constrained Resources

The *Essential Competencies for Occupational Therapists in Canada* offers various actions/strategies which can be developed when client needs exceed the resources available. Consider:

- Consulting, and collaborating within the facility to develop priorities for services;
- Setting realistic limits on what kind of services can be delivered with the current funding and communicating this with the manager, and the team;
- Identifying the risks to clients and safety issues in the event that insufficient resources are delivered. If client safety is a concern at any time, the OT should also be alerting the appropriate people in those specific situations;
- Defining the impacts of reduced funding on an OT's ability to provide the appropriate/needed, safe, OT services to clients by raising the issue with the appropriate stakeholders;
- Consulting, sharing and collaborating with other OTs outside the facility to investigate their ways of dealing with limited resources and participating in the association to address funding issues, and participate in advocating with the association;
- Utilizing Evidence Based Care and Best Practices, and developing service models based on those findings which may interest the management of the facility or payers;
- Developing a new, innovative service model and requesting funding to carry out a pilot project of this model. There may be government funding available for new care models.

When caseloads are larger than can be safely and effectively managed, some strategies to consider are:

- Critically review, evaluate and revise the services being delivered;
- Document results of the review;
- Determine and prioritize the most important services to offer, based on client need;
- Stop doing what is not effective;
- Propose plan to Manager/Director for revised services;
- Consult/collaborate with team regarding the new service plan to arrive at agreement; document the plan, as a policy or procedure, and circulate to relevant team and stakeholders.

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