Standards for Occupational Therapist Assessments

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Introduction

Assessments are an integral part of occupational therapy practice. Assessment is defined as “the process of gathering sufficient information about individuals and their environments to make informed decisions about intervention.”¹ It serves as the foundation for an occupational therapist’s clinical decisions, professional opinions, interventions, and recommendations. Within their clinical assessment occupational therapists can incorporate standardized and/or non-standardized assessment tools. Assessment is an ongoing process throughout service delivery.

The College uses the term “client” to refer to the individual(s) who receive occupational therapy services from an OT. Under the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, the term “patient” is used to refer to the recipient of health care service provided by a regulated health professional. For the purpose of the Standards for Occupational Therapist Assessments, the terms “client” and “patient” have the same meaning.

Some occupational therapists will work as solo practitioners, others may function within a team-based environment (e.g. multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary). The type and format of occupational therapist assessments may vary due to many factors including: the purpose of the assessment, service delivery model, practice setting, and available resources. Occupational therapist assessments involve a comprehensive, consistent, and collaborative process. Occupational therapists are expected to apply evidence-informed practices throughout the assessment process and draw on their knowledge, skills, judgement, and experience to determine the most suitable approach to an assessment.

This means that the approach used to conduct assessments can differ between individual occupational therapists depending on the client’s physical, social, cognitive, emotional, behavioural, environmental, and communication needs. Assessment data can be collected using both formal and informal approaches of gathering information. Depending on the nature of the assessment, collateral information can be collected from various sources.

The Standards for Occupational Therapist Assessments reflect the most common approach to occupational therapist assessments and are based on core occupational therapy principles outlined in the Essential Competencies of Practice for Occupational Therapists in Canada, 3rd edition. The purpose of these Standards is to ensure that occupational therapists in Ontario are aware of the minimum expectations for the assessment component of their practice.

Application of the Standards for Occupational Therapist Assessments

• The following standards describe the minimum expectations for occupational therapists.
• The performance indicators listed below each standard describe more specific behaviours that demonstrate the Standard has been met.
• It is not expected that all performance indicators will be evident all the time. It is expected performance indicators could be demonstrated by the occupational therapist if requested.
• There may be some situations where the occupational therapist determines that a particular

¹ Christiansen & Baum, 1992, pg. 376.
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performance indicator has less relevance due to client or environmental factors. Such situations may call for the occupational therapist to seek further clarification.

- It is expected that occupational therapists will always use their clinical judgement to determine how to best complete the assessment based on the scope of the referral and specific client needs.
- It is expected that occupational therapists will be able to provide a reasonable rationale for any variations from the Standard.

In the event of any conflict or inconsistency between these Standards for Occupational Therapist Assessments and other College Standards, the Standard with the most recent issue or revised date prevail.

College publications contain practice parameters and standards that all occupational therapists practising in Ontario must utilize in the delivery of service to their clients and in the practice of the profession. College Standards are developed in consultation with occupational therapists and describe current professional expectations. College Standards may be used by the College or other bodies in determining whether appropriate standards of practice and professional responsibilities have been maintained.

Pursuant to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 (RHPA), the College is authorized to make regulations in relation to professional practice. The College’s Professional Misconduct Regulation establishes that “contravening, by act or omission, a standard of practice of the profession or failing to maintain a standard of the profession” constitutes grounds for professional misconduct.

Overview of the Standards for Occupational Therapist Assessments

1. Service Initiation
2. Screening the Referral
3. Consent
4. Assessment
5. Analysis and Recommendations
6. Record Keeping
7. Disclosing Information

1. Service Initiation

Standard 1

The occupational therapist will establish a personal scope of practice and demonstrate knowledge, skills, and judgement to practice within this scope prior to accepting referrals.
Performance Indicators

An occupational therapist will:

1.1 Determine if the assessment falls within their specific role and occupational therapy scope of practice;

1.2 Determine if they have the required knowledge, skills and judgment needed to deliver the service;

1.3 Have sufficient knowledge of the legislation, regulatory and organizational requirements relevant to their area of practice and method of service delivery;

1.4 Clearly explain their role and responsibilities to the client/substitute decision maker (SDM) and all stakeholders;

1.5 Perform occupational therapist assessments in accordance with the Standards of practice and the Code of Ethics.

2. Screening the Referral

Standard 2

The occupational therapist will screen the referral and gather sufficient information to determine whether or not to proceed with the occupational therapy assessment.

Performance Indicators

An OT will:

2.1 Determine who is the client(s) and confirm identity;

2.2 Gather and review client information to determine whether or not to proceed with the assessment and communicate this finding to the client/SDM and referral source (if appropriate);

2.3 Prevent and manage any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest prior to proceeding with the assessment;

2.4 Communicate to the client/SDM and referral source (if appropriate) the scope of the assessment; and the required processes to proceed with the occupational therapy service;

2.5 Validate clinical information with the client/SDM and make reasonable efforts to ensure the accuracy of the information collected from other sources;

2.6 Communicate the reason to client/SDM or third-party stakeholder if the referral is declined;

2.7 Determine if it is safe to proceed with the assessment and manage any identified barriers
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2.8 Refer clients/SDM to appropriate resources if the referral is beyond the scope of the occupational therapy service.

3. Consent

Standard 3

The occupational therapist will ensure the necessary consent is obtained from the client/SDM in accordance with the Standards for Consent.

Performance Indicators

An occupational therapist will:

3.1 Determine client capacity to consent and participate in the assessment;

3.2 Obtain consent for the assessment, discussing the following with the client/SDM:
   a) The scope of the assessment and who the payer is (or confirming the financial arrangements if the client is paying directly),
   b) The purpose and nature of the assessment including whether information will or needs to be obtained from other individuals,
   c) The legal authority (e.g., voluntary, contractual, legislative provision) for conducting the assessment,
   d) The identity and professional qualifications of individuals who will be involved in the assessment, (e.g., other team members, etc.),
   e) The potential benefits and limitations of completing the assessment,
   f) The risks associated with completing or not completing the assessment,
   g) The expected process of the assessment, how the information will be collected, used, and disclosed,
   h) The option of the client to withdraw consent at any time during the process,
   i) Where appropriate, provide alternate options to the client, if the OT does not have the competencies required to perform the assessment;

3.3 Respect client choice not to proceed with the assessment and engage client/SDM in a collaborative approach to understand the implications when withdrawing consent to participate in the assessment;

3.4 Ensure appropriate consent is obtained to collect, use, and disclose personal health information and assessment results; unless not legally required to do so;
3.5 At the onset of service, clarify expectations about how the information will be shared;

3.6 Confirm that consent obtained by a third party meets the requirements outlined in the Standards for Consent.

4. Assessment

**Standard 4**

The occupational therapist will apply and use safe assessment methods and tools that are client-centred, and evidence-informed to assess the client’s occupational performance issues.

**Performance Indicators**

An occupational therapist will:

4.1 Identify the occupational performance issues to be assessed based on the subjective and objective information gathered;

4.2 Select a theoretical approach, assessment methods and tools, that are appropriate to assess the client;

4.3 Review the psychometric properties of the standardized assessment (reliability, validity) to determine the appropriateness of the tool to assess the client

4.3.1 Have the necessary training to administer the assessment tool;

4.4 Manage any risks, contraindications, or limitations of using the selected tools or methods of assessment with the client;

4.5 Remain current, using relevant evidence and best practice approaches;

4.6 Collaborate and communicate with the client/SDM and other stakeholders regarding the assessment approach process.

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5. Analysis and Recommendations

Standard 5

The occupational therapist will ensure they have sufficient information to proceed with the analysis in order to formulate professional opinions and recommendations.

Performance Indicators

An occupational therapist will:

5.1 Analyze all relevant information collected, using the subjective, objective and assessment findings;

5.2 Identify any gaps in the assessment findings and determine if there is a need to gather additional information;

5.3 Determine if the assessment represents a fair and unbiased evaluation of the client;

5.4 Consider the strengths and limitations of the person, environment and occupation and the impact on occupational performance issues;

5.5 Develop recommendations based on the analysis of the information gathered,

5.6 Consider access and availability of resources when making recommendations;

5.7 Determine the need to make a referral to other practitioners for further assessment;

5.8 Determine if further evaluation is required, when additional information becomes available by the client or other stakeholders following the initial occupational therapy assessment.

6. Record Keeping

Standard 6

The occupational therapist will document assessment methods, processes, and findings in accordance with the Standards for Record Keeping.

Performance Indicators

An occupational therapist will ensure that:

6.1 Client records are maintained in accordance with the Standards for Record Keeping;

6.2 Documentation is completed in a manner that is accurate, concise, and reflective of the assessment including: consents obtained, sources of information, assessment approach and procedures, results, analysis, professional opinions, and recommendations;
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6.3 Documentation complies with timeframes, formats, and standards of practice and established processes of the practice setting;

6.4 Data gathered by the occupational therapist and used to inform clinical decisions, which cannot be included or summarized in the record, will be retained. The occupational therapist will document in the client record or assessment report indicating the existence and location of this data.

   Note: Converting data to an electronic format, for retention purposes, is appropriate as long as the integrity of the data is upheld;

6.5 Document client participation, and any client, tool or environmental limitations associated with the assessment process;

6.6 Assessment documentation is complete and accurate prior to finalizing documents and applying their signature;

7. Disclosing Information

Standard 7

The occupational therapist will ensure that relevant assessment information is communicated (results, opinions, recommendations) to the client/SDM or relevant stakeholders in a clear and timely manner.

An occupational therapist will:

7.1 Communicate assessment results in a timely manner using terminology that the client/SDM can easily understand;

7.2 Discuss the outcome of the assessment with the client/SDM and provide an opportunity to obtain clarification if required;

7.3 Confirm client consent for the disclosure of the assessment information to third-party payers/stakeholders unless exceptions apply under privacy legislations;

7.4 Provide their professional contact information should there be questions about the OT assessment;

7.5 Comply with current legislation when withholding all or part of the client’s record if sharing information will result in harm to the client or others;

7.6 Ensure the client/SDM is aware of the process to access the clinical record or assessment report;

7.7 Take reasonable measures to ensure that any occupational therapy assessment information disclosed on behalf of the occupational therapist is accurate and represents the occupational therapist’s professional opinion and clinical judgement.
References


