

Learnings from the Quality Assurance Program Competency Assessments

Conflicts of Interest in Practice: Not Always Obvious, Always Important

Conflicts of interest (COI) arise when **personal, financial or relational factors** have the potential to **influence** an occupational therapist's **professional judgement**. In practice, this can impact objectivity, client trust, and quality of care.

Common Conflicts of Interest

These are the **six most common COI themes** identified from 280 competency assessment responses:



Familiarity with Clients

Referrals for clients known through personal, social or community connections that could influence objectivity or create preferential treatment



Vendor Referrals

Referring clients to a particular vendor without presenting options, not comparing or disclosing alternatives, or defaulting to familiar vendors.



Gifts & Benefits

Exchanges that alter the therapeutic relationship or create preferential treatment including high-value or repeated gifts.



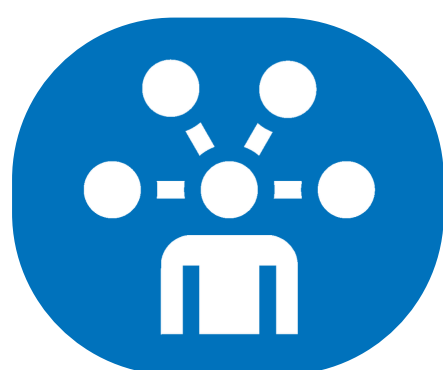
Self-Referral

Clients directed to services where the occupational therapist has a personal or financial interest.



Preferential Provider Referrals

Referring to service providers based on familiarity or workplace relationships rather than offering a client multiple options/choice.

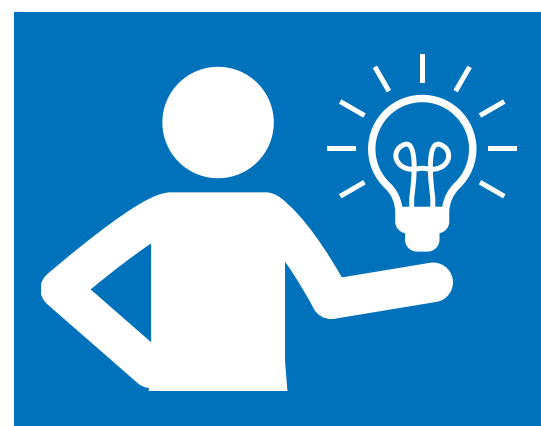


External Influences

Influence from outside parties affecting clinical decisions. For example pressure from employers, families, insurers, colleagues, lawyers, etc.

How Did Occupational Therapists Manage These Conflicts of Interest?

Four common COI management strategies emerged from 280 assessments:



Proactivity

Prevent COIs early: Avoid working with familiar clients, maintain clear professional role boundaries, avoid self-referrals, transfer of care to another occupational therapist prior to providing services.



Transparency & Collaborative Guidance

Address COIs openly: Discuss COI to clients and families, document COI decisions and actions, consider consultations with supervisors, managers, or regulatory body (COTO).



Client Choice

Support client-centred decisions: Provide multiple vendor/provider options, prioritize client's best interests, avoid biased recommendations, maintain impartiality with inquiries.



Management of Gifts & Benefits

Address gifts appropriately: Decline inappropriate gifts, accept only low-value, non-recurring items, ensure gifts do not compromise therapeutic relationships, establish professional boundaries at the onset and throughout care, ensure conduct doesn't lead to preferential treatment.

Why Does This Matter To Occupational Therapists?



- Some COIs aren't always obvious—you may encounter them without realizing it
- COIs can influence client care and trust in the occupational therapist
- Use this information to recognize, address and manage COIs to protect your clients and your practice.

Review the [Standard for the Prevention and Management of Conflict of Interest](#).

For more information about the competency assessment click [here](#).

If you have any questions, contact the Quality Assurance team at gaprogram@coto.org.