

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST ASSISTANT & PHYSIOTHERAPIST ASSISTANT EDUCATION ACCREDITATION PROGRAM

GUIDE-06 SUPERVISION OF OTA/PTA STUDENTS DURING FIELDWORK

PREAMBLE

Occupational therapist assistant (OTA) and physiotherapist assistant (PTA) students must be supervised during fieldwork placements. Supervision may be provided by an OTA/PTA, or by an occupational therapist (OT), or a physiotherapist (PT). Fieldwork experiences contribute to the overall learning of the student; they assist in application of theoretical knowledge and provide an opportunity to practice skills learned in classroom and during lab sessions, as well as allowing for exposure to a workplace environment with “real-life” patients. However, it is critical for the safety of both the patient and the student that independence is provided only when the student has demonstrated competence in the assigned task.

The Canadian Occupational Therapist Assistant & Physiotherapist Assistant Educators Council (COPEC) has published a position statement (*Position Statement on the Supervision of Occupational Therapist Assistant Students and Physiotherapy Assistant Students in Practice Settings in Canada, June, 2011*) regarding supervision of OTA/PTA students (see [Appendix](#)). This Guideline serves to describe the accreditation requirements with regards to OTA/PTA student supervision.

Current Practice

An environmental scan of the education programs currently affiliated with the OTA & PTA EAP indicates that in many practice environments, OTA/PTA students, while on fieldwork placements, are supervised by OTA/PTAs practising in that environment. Those OTA/PTAs, in turn, are supervised by an OT or a PT who has overall responsibility for patient care as per any applicable regulatory requirements.

Definitions

Primary Preceptor:

The primary preceptor is the person most responsible for supervision of the OTA/PTA student. The primary preceptor may be an OTA/PTA or an OT or PT.

Other Preceptors:

In many practice environments, other preceptors are involved in supervision and may assign tasks to an OTA/PTA student. These other preceptors may be OTA/PTAs, or OTs or PTs who are part of a larger care team.

Responsibilities

During fieldwork placements, an OTA/PTA student has the responsibility to:

- Ensure patient safety;
- Contribute to the development of objectives for the experience;
- Recognize her/his knowledge, skills and abilities, limits of responsibilities, legislative authority and supervision requirements, and act to obtain appropriate supervision if necessary;
- Let the primary preceptor know if assigned duties and responsibilities exceed ability or scope;
- Notify the primary preceptor (or the education program if appropriate) if not achieving objectives due to setting and/or preceptor(s) relationship;
- Regularly communicate with the preceptor(s) (as applicable) and provide/invite feedback; and
- Participate with the primary preceptor in mid and final evaluations.

A primary preceptor (OTA/PTA, OT, or PT) has the responsibility to:

- Ensure patient safety;
- Assist the OTA/PTA student in development and achievement of objectives for the experience;
- Recognize legislative authority and supervision requirements;
- Supervise the OTA/PTA student in the performance of assigned tasks;
- Regularly communicate with the OTA/PTA student and provide/invite feedback; and
- Participate in evaluation of the OTA/PTA student at midterm and at the end of the placement.

Faculty at the student's institution have the responsibility to:

- Prepare OTA/PTA student and preceptors training;
- Find fieldwork placements;
- Ensure an appropriate mix of clinical experience; and
- Monitor student progress, including problem solving, overseeing conflict resolution, and providing mediation as required.

OTA & PTA EAP Accreditation Requirements

Education programs must demonstrate that facilities who agree to supervise OTA/PTA students are aware that when an OTA/PTA is the OTA/PTA student's primary preceptor:

1. The assignment of task to the OTA/PTA preceptor and OTA/PTA student by the OT or PT must be documented as per any applicable legislation.
2. The OT or PT is ultimately responsible for patient safety and the treatment the patient receives.
3. The primary preceptor must assess competence in the OTA/PTA student prior to assignment of any activities to the student.
4. The primary preceptor should co-sign the clinical record when the OTA/PTA student makes an entry as required by applicable legislation and/or institutional requirements.

5. The supervising OT or PT must participate in the midterm and final evaluations of the student, along with the OTA/PTA, including signing any evaluation forms. Where there is shared supervision responsibilities the institution is responsible for identifying the most responsible signator.

Guideline Number: GUIDE-06	
Date of last revision	Associated documents
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Appendix

Position Statement on the Supervision of Occupational Therapist Assistant Students and Physiotherapy Assistant Students in Practice Settings in Canada June, 2011

Introduction

This Position Statement describes the Canadian Occupational Therapist Assistant and Physiotherapist Assistant Program Educators' Council's (COPEC) expectations regarding the supervision of Occupational Therapist Assistant students and Physiotherapist Assistant students in practice settings in Canada.

Background

- A Physiotherapist Assistant (PTA) student in a practice setting is an individual who is enrolled in a PTA educational program and is learning their role in a practice setting under the supervision of a registered Physiotherapist (PT).¹
- An Occupational Therapist Assistant (OTA) student in a practice setting is an individual who is enrolled in an OTA educational program and is learning their role in a practice setting under the supervision of a registered Occupational Therapist (OT).²
- OTAs and PTAs are both unregulated health professions in Canada.
- OTs and PTs working with OTA and PTA students are responsible and accountable for all services provided to their clients, including all tasks assigned to the OTA and PTA.^{1,2}
- The *Competency Profile: Essential Competencies of Physiotherapist Support Workers in Canada* states that all areas of Physiotherapy practice are to be supervised by registered PTs.¹
- The *Practice Profile for Support Personnel in Occupational Therapy* states that all areas of Occupational Therapy practice be supervised by qualified OTs and that OTs are responsible for designing and implementing all areas of Occupational Therapy service.²
- Guidelines for supervision may also be provided by OT and PT provincial regulatory bodies.
- CAOT refers to formally-educated OTAs as *Broad-based Support Personnel* in the *Practice Profile for Support Personnel in Occupational Therapy*.²
- The *Practice Profile for Support Personnel in Occupational Therapy* states that broad based support personnel (OTAs) can participate in the learning process for other learners within the Occupational Therapy service.²
- CPA refers to formally-educated PTAs as *Group One Physiotherapist Support Workers* in the competency profile for Physiotherapist Support workers.¹
- The *Competency Profile: Essential Competencies of Physiotherapist Support Workers in Canada* states that *Group One Physiotherapist Support Workers* can provide appropriate supervision of volunteers and PTA students, as directed by the Physiotherapist.¹

Position

It is the position of COPEC that the learning and practice of OTA and PTA students is under the direction and supervision of a registered OT and/or PT and is informed by the guidelines set out by the therapist's respective regulatory body with regards to supervision guidelines and the assignment of tasks to OTAs and PTAs. It is appropriate for the supervision of students to be assigned to an experienced OTA and/or PTA, under the supervision of an OT and/or PT.

Expectations

1. The delivery of Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy services is the responsibility of the expert in that area, the PT and/or OT.
2. Assigning of tasks is the responsibility of the therapist, according to the therapist's regulatory body.
3. The supervising therapist will utilize the competency and practice profiles developed by the respective OT and PT national bodies, and other provincial and national standards and guidelines, to assist with the understanding of the scope of practice and role of the OTA and PTA student in the practice setting.
4. The supervising therapist will utilize guidelines set by the therapists' respective regulatory body with regards to supervision guidelines and the assignment of tasks to OTA and PTA students.
5. OTA and PTA students are required to be under the supervision of a registered therapist in practice settings.
6. OTA and PTA students must have the ability to contact a supervising therapist at all times during practice. Different practice settings will have different models of supervision including direct supervision in some settings such as acute care, through to contact via phone or pager in settings such as community practice.

References

1. *Competency Profile: Essential Competencies of Physiotherapist Support Workers in Canada*. Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators, Canadian Physiotherapy Association. 2002.
2. *Practice Profile for Support Personnel in Occupational Therapy*. Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists. 2009.
3. *Guidelines for the Supervision of Assigned Occupational Therapy Service Components*. Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists. 2007.
4. *Guidelines on the Role and Utilization of Physical Therapist Support Workers in Physical Therapy Practice in Canada*. Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators. 2000.

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