

Bringing inter-professional collaboration to a new level

Like all good things, it began at the roots, growing green and vibrant from those tending to it to create something strong and enduring. It all started with a conversation among professionals in occupational therapist assistant (OTA) and physiotherapist assistant (PTA) education about the need and desire to ensure PTA and OTA education programs could be assessed to ensure high educational standards. The result was an inter-professional collaboration success story.

In 2010, the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT), the Canadian Occupational Therapist Assistant and Physiotherapist Assistant Educators Council (COPEC) and Physiotherapy Education Accreditation Canada (PEAC) came together to create a new, unique accreditation program for both physical and occupational therapist assistant programs. Each association took on select roles and responsibilities and created the Occupational Therapist Assistant and Physiotherapist Assistant Education Accreditation Program (OTA & PTA EAP).

Today, less than three years later there are established Accreditation Standards, a Joint Accreditation Committee, policies and procedures, a creative and informative website and 28 college OT and PT programs with candidacy status. Of these 28 programs, two have already undergone reviews and are now accredited (at Vancouver Community College and Humber College of Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning), and three other programs are expected to receive accreditation decisions by the end of April.

“We hope to be able to review four or five programs a year. Right now programs newly awarded Candidacy Status are placed at the bottom of the list, and it is quite a lengthy process so we may need to add more resources in the future, which is a wonderful position to be in,” says Kathy Davidson, OTA & PTA EAP program manager.

“One of our challenges has been that we don’t know how many programs are out there. For many educational programs, graduation from an accredited program is required, but PTAs and OTAs aren’t licensed so the programs don’t need to be accredited – they are doing it by choice,” she explains.

The exception is in Quebec where the education of “thérapeute en réadaptation physique (TRP)” is different and TRPs are licensed by the “Ordre professionnel de la physiothérapie du Québec”, the regulatory body for physiotherapists in the province. See this article in ‘Physiotherapy Practice’ for details regarding their unique role: www.physiotherapy.ca/Practice-Resources/Publications/Physiotherapy-Practice.aspx?id=4

It is an indicator of the success of the OTA & PTA EAP that so many colleges are putting their programs forward as candidates for accreditation, and students are also engaged.

“It is very exciting to now be having students contacting us as they make choices in their own education; they want a higher quality education and want to know what programs are accredited,” says Davidson. “This has been absolutely positive. It has truly been a grassroots effort with the PTAs and OTAs and their educators seeking this quality themselves. Unlike other professions where accreditation of the educational programs is required, the colleges, students and the OTAs and PTAs wanted this. It is amazing to see how everyone came together to strive for higher standards and quality education.”

One of the reasons the OTA & PTA EAP has developed quickly and successfully is because of the collaborative approach at the outset. The program was developed under Dawn Burnett, the original program manager, with CAOT, COPEC and PEAC all contributing. Burnett, who was hired to develop and pilot the process, helped ensure all stakeholders were sought and asked to provide their insight and opinion.

“Because this program was developed from scratch and everyone who had a role to play was asked for input, what evolved was a program everyone was familiar with in some capacity, and that resulted in less push-back. For example, everyone worked together through surveys and focus groups around the wording of the Accreditation Standards, what standards should be set, and what was reasonable to expect programs to meet and achieve,” says Davidson, who replaced Burnett once the OTA & PTA EAP was established.

The resulting Accreditation Standards for 2012-2014 are now in place after several drafts, with the option in 2014 to do some modifications and tweaking based on completed evaluations and feedback from both sites and reviewers.

With the reviews on a six-year cycle, and a growing list of programs with Candidacy Status, Davidson says the focus in 2013 will be finding volunteers for the peer review teams.

“We will be doing a lot of education around what constitutes a peer review and the accreditation process and the benefits for volunteers – for example, they learn about the process and required documentation which puts them 10 steps ahead in understanding what will be required for their own program accreditation,” she says.

This year will also see Davidson travel to Vancouver with her colleagues from CAOT and COPEC in June to make a presentation on the OTA & PTA EAP as an example of successful inter-professional collaboration at the Collaborating Across Borders (CAB IV) conference.

“I would like to add that the support from AAAC and the experience and knowledge we were able to draw from that group so many times has been incredible, and it has been invaluable in helping us develop this program,” says Davidson.

For more information on OTA & PTA EAP, please visit www.otapta.ca.

New template streamlines CCUPEKA review process

A small investment has yielded big results for the Canadian Council of University Physical Education and Kinesiology Administrators (CCUPEKA).

Last year accreditation coordinator Dr. Tina Gabriele implemented a new template for reviewers to accompany the CCUPEKA accreditation application self-study documentation. The result was a streamlined process that has given consistency to the reports filed by reviewers.

“I spoke with some of our more experienced reviewers who knew the programs and curriculum to find out what would work. I used the criteria required for our institutions for the headings and created empty tables for the reviewers to fill out,” explains Dr. Gabriele. “It didn’t take more than 10 hours to develop but already it is expediting the process.”

To date, four reviews have been completed using the new template and the response has been extremely positive.

“I have heard from the reviewers who have used it that they love it. We’ve been told ‘what a difference this made’ and ‘you have done all the work for us’ but we haven’t, it is just much easier to provide the information we need. The reviewers still have to fill it out.”

The need to develop the template became apparent when some reviewers would send in 20-page documents, while others would only be several pages in length.

“The template ensures all the questions are answered and all the criteria are addressed – before we might have to call a reviewer, sometimes multiple times, to get the answers we need,” says Dr. Gabriele. “The template really meant the committee can evaluate the program reviews much more quickly and the information we are receiving is detailed and organized.”

With a French review scheduled for 2013, the template is now being translated. And while it has meant a faster, more consistent approach to the accreditation process, there are no plans to create an online fillable version of the template.

“We are so small that our reviews were rather informal, but this has helped us become more efficient,” says Dr. Gabriele.

Currently there are 10 university programs in physical education (PE) accredited by CCUPEKA and 22 university programs in kinesiology (KNES). There are 37 universities in total in CCUPEKA as some institutions offer both KNES and PE– accreditation is not mandatory for either university program at this time.