



Development, Implementation and Value of an Accreditation Program for OTA and PTA Education



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Background

In Canada, occupational therapist assistants (OTAs) and physiotherapist assistants (PTAs):

- are unregulated
- are educated in diploma programs (usually two years in length)
- are increasingly valued to augment occupational therapy (OT) and physiotherapy (PT) practice
- graduate from education programs (public and private) that vary in quality

The Canadian Occupational Therapist Assistant and Physiotherapist Assistant Educators Council (COPEC) identified the need for an accreditation program for Canadian OTA/PTA education to provide a measure of educational quality to students, employers and the public.

In 2009 COPEC approached Physiotherapy Education Accreditation Canada (PEAC) – accreditor for Canadian PT education programs – and the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) – accreditor for Canadian OT education programs – to develop an appropriate accreditation program.

Development: 2009-2011

OTA & PTA education accreditation standards were developed based on an accepted 5+1 model and were referenced to existing OTA and PTA competency profiles and to existing OT and PT education accreditation standards.

OTA & PTA EAP policies and procedures were developed.

Standards and policies/procedures were refined in collaboration with COPEC and other key stakeholders through an online survey, national focus groups, a Standards Working Group and an Advisory Committee.

There were 18 education programs who became early adopters.

Implementation: 2012

Two education programs pilot-tested the standards and process in Jan/Feb 2012.

A Joint Accreditation Committee (JAC) was established with representation from CAOT, PEAC, COPEC, OTA/PTAs, and the public to oversee the accreditation process and make accreditation status recommendations.

Evaluative feedback was collected from the programs, peer reviewers, and the JAC which resulted in changes to both standards and policies.

The Accreditation Program Today: May 2015

There are 31 affiliated programs across Canada, 12 with accreditation status, the remaining 19 awaiting accreditation review.

11 programs are in private institutions.

20 programs are in publicly funded institutions.

Increased awareness of the accreditation process by preceptors, employers, students and potential students, PTs and OTs, has resulted in:

- free membership in CPA and CAOT for students in affiliated programs
- eligibility for membership in CPA and CAOT for graduates of programs with accreditation status
- offers of fieldwork placements and supervision restricted to students from affiliated programs in some health regions
- employers seeking graduates from affiliated programs when hiring
- programs improvements instituted to demonstrate eligibility for the accreditation process and compliance with accreditation standards
- an increase of 78% in the number of affiliated programs over three years, with additional programs applying to the process each year

Discussion & Conclusions

Accreditation has resulted in broader recognition of OTA/PTAs as professionals who:

- have demonstrated a defined set of competencies
- are valued members of the health care team
- work under the supervision of a regulated OT or PT

The accreditation process has resulted in more consistency and higher quality among the OTA/PTA education programs.

While accreditation continues to be voluntary for OTA/PTA education programs, the added value to programs and graduates cannot be underestimated.

In the absence of regulation, accreditation is one measure of the quality of graduates from affiliated programs.

Recommendations

Collaboration is essential in the development of an education accreditation program engaging several key stakeholder groups - communication at every stage is critical.

Choosing an accreditation model that has been tested builds confidence and saves time.

Ongoing evaluation to ensure consistency in decision making, currency of standards, and effectiveness and efficiency of policies and procedures is essential.

Profiling the added value of accreditation helps programs, graduates and employers understand the importance of quality in health professional education.

Contact details

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