



PEI College of Occupational Therapists

Practice Guideline:

Task Assignment and Supervision of Occupational Therapist Assistants (OTAs)

Occupational therapists routinely utilize the assistance of occupational therapist assistants (OTAs) in order to optimize occupational therapy service delivery. The purpose of this document is two-fold:

- 1) to define occupational therapist assistants and their role in the provision of occupational therapy services on PEI, and
- 2) to ensure that occupational therapists in P.E.I. are aware of the minimum expectations for the supervision of occupational therapist assistants.

This document has been updated based on review of current documents from other Canadian occupational therapy regulatory organizations and the Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy Regulatory Organizations' (ACOTRO) Position Statement regarding Utilizing Occupational Therapist Assistants in Occupational Therapy Service Delivery.

Definitions

Terms	Definitions
Client	An individual, group, agency, or organization that has been accepted by the OT for service provision and who has consented to receive occupational therapy services.
Consultation	The process of providing expert advice, education, training, programming and/or recommendations to a client or another service provider in response to an occupational performance issue. The OT is accountable for the recommendations and programming but is not directly responsible for the personnel that carry them out. Consultation is frequently a time-limited process.
Informed Consent	A process whereby the OT ensures that the client understands the purpose and expected outcomes of the occupational therapy service(s) to be provided, the potential benefits and risks, any reasonable alternatives, and the consequences of refusing and not receiving the service(s).
Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA)	Service providers who deliver assigned occupational therapy service components under the supervision of a registered occupational therapist (OT). OTAs currently graduate from a recognized OTA or OTA/PTA or Rehabilitation Assistant education program. The OTA is required to have the skills and ability to provide the service components assigned to them.
Registered Occupational Therapist	An individual who is registered or licensed by a provincial regulatory body as an occupational therapist. The Prince Edward Island College of Occupational Therapists is the regulatory body for OTs in Prince Edward Island. The use of the title of Occupational Therapist is legally protected in each province in Canada.
Task Assignment	The process by which an OT designates the delivery of specific components of the occupational therapy plan for a specific client(s) to an individual who is not a registered OT, specifically, to an OTA. The accountability for the assigned components remains with the OT. An interactive process that enables the OT to monitor the performance of the OTA in carrying out the assigned task(s) safely and effectively.
Task Assignment Supervision	Supervision includes educating, observing, managing, and supporting and is a key aspect of task assignment. This process is dynamic in nature and requires monitoring and re-evaluation by the supervising OT. Supervision may be direct, indirect, or remote. A) Direct – the OT is in the vicinity of, or in direct visual contact with the OTA; B) Indirect – the OT is in the same facility and may be easily contacted; or C) Remote – there is no OT on-site. In the case of C) Remote, there must be a documented supervision plan, a plan for emergencies, a designated on-site health care professional for concerns or emergencies, and the OT is available by phone or other means.

Practice Guidelines

Tasks may be assigned to an OTA by a registered OT when the task assignment will not compromise the care of the client, and will improve the access to, quality of, and/or effectiveness of the occupational therapy service. The OT will ensure the following are addressed:

That the Client –

- a) Provides informed consent to the OT to authorize the OTA to carry out the assigned tasks of the service, and
- b) Receives service that is not compromised by the task assignment.

That the OT –

- a) Models respectful behaviors toward OTAs and provides a safe and inclusive environment for them.
- b) Creates an environment where OTAs are comfortable and able to raise concerns about unfair, unsafe, or culturally inappropriate experiences and have a clear process in place for reporting such problems.
- c) Knows the appropriate tasks that can be assigned and ensures that the OTA(s) is/are competent to complete them.
- d) Ensures that assignment of a particular case does not create a conflict of interest for either the OT or the OTA e.g., working with current or former relative or friend, etc.
- e) Monitors client's response to the service being provided by the OTA and discuss any concerns with the client.
- f) Never assigns the following tasks to OTAs:
 - Initiation of occupational therapy services,
 - Aspects of assessment requiring the OT's clinical judgement,
 - Interpretation of assessment findings,
 - Interventions where ongoing analysis and synthesis are necessary to closely monitor and guide client progress,
 - Communication (written or verbal) of occupational therapy recommendations, opinions, or findings requiring clinical judgment,
 - Planning and decision-making involving discharge or referral to another agency/provider,
 - Tasks that are outside of the occupational therapy scope of practice, and
 - Interventions outside of the registered occupational therapist's area/level of competence.
- g) Establishes appropriate limits for occupational therapist assistants' participation in intervention planning, goal identification, and progressing or modifying an intervention.

- h) Establish a supervisory plan for providing services, including the following:
- Roles, responsibilities, and methods of supervision,
 - Predetermined opportunities to debrief, as well as expectations for and methods of reporting by assistants to the OT,
 - Activities that will be assigned to assistants, and
 - Activities that assistants can carry out if the OT is unavailable to provide direct, indirect, or remote supervision.

That the OTA -

- a) Understands their role and responsibilities,
- b) Clearly identifies and represents their role as following through on tasks assigned by and assisting the supervising OT; OTAs do not work independently of an OT.
- c) Demonstrates competence to provide the service safely and effectively,
- d) Receives appropriate training to carry out assigned tasks,
- e) Acknowledges accountability to the supervising OT in completing assigned tasks,
- f) Understands how and when to contact the supervising OT,
- g) Changes or modifies tasks within limits established by the supervising OT
- h) Discloses a real or potential conflict of interest to the OT without delay and prior to accepting assigned tasks, and
- i) Documents appropriately as directed by the supervising OT.

That documentation -

- a) Includes evidence that appropriate consent was received,
- b) Includes plans regarding the assigned tasks, and
- c) Follows the Standard for Record Keeping.

Accountability

When an OTA is performing additional tasks that do not fall under the responsibility of the OT, the OTA is accountable to their direct supervisor or another regulated health professional e.g. if administering a mobility plan assigned by a physiotherapist or performing administrative tasks in a facility.

OTs will be fully accountable for all OT task(s) assigned to OTAs.

OTs will ensure that the assignment of tasks to OTAs improve the access to, quality of, and/or effectiveness of the occupational therapy service and does not compromise the care of the client.

The occupational therapist is **not** professionally accountable for the delivery of assigned tasks by OTAs in the following situations:

- The OTA deliberately performs occupational therapy service tasks that have not

- been specifically assigned by the supervising OT; or
- The OTA performs occupational therapy service tasks that are outside the parameters of service set by the supervising OT.

The OT is responsible for an adequate level of supervision. If the supervising OT becomes aware of either of these situations, they need to intervene immediately and appropriately, including taking steps to prevent reoccurrence of the situation.

When an OT provides a consultation service (see definition page 5), tasks will not be assigned to OTAs, however, recommendations may be made to non-OTA individuals, e.g. educators, family members, etc. The OT will be responsible for the quality of their consultation but is not accountable for the implementation or outcome of the recommendations. OTs must be clear on the distinction between situations that involve the use of OTAs and situations when the OT is fulfilling a consulting role.

The OT may not be accountable for *performance management issues* and administrative tasks related to the OTA, as accountability in this area is usually determined by the program, facility, business or organization that funds the services.

The information provided herein is presented as a reference only and is not intended to be a complete review of all aspects and considerations associated with the use of OTAs. Registrants are advised to be diligent about their practices and the appropriate use of OTAs in a given client situation. Registrants are reminded that they are professionally accountable to their clients for services rendered by OTAs in all situations other than those clearly articulated herein. Registrants must remain engaged with their clients who are under the care of an OTA and must remain active in a monitoring and oversight role.

References

Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy Regulatory Organizations (ACOTRO). (2019). Position Statement regarding Utilizing Occupational therapist assistants in Occupational Therapy Service Delivery. Toronto, ON: Author.

College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario (COTO). (2023). Standards for the Supervision of Students and Occupational therapist assistants. Toronto, ON: Author.

Newfoundland & Labrador Occupational Therapy Board (NLOTB). (2021). Practice Guideline: Task Assignment to Assistants in Occupational Therapy Service Delivery. St. John's. NL: Author.

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