The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) recognizes that support personnel are a vital component of the occupational therapy workforce. Support personnel in occupational therapy are a diverse group of workers with different job titles and types of training.

**Utilization of support personnel:**
CAOT supports the inclusion of support personnel in the delivery of occupational therapy services where their contribution enhances the effectiveness of occupational therapy services. Support personnel support the occupational therapist in performing their roles. They do not replace or substitute the work or practice of the occupational therapist. Specific job expectations are determined by the requirements of the supervising occupational therapist and the needs and environment of the client.

**Education of occupational therapy support personnel:**
A continuum of knowledge, skills and abilities are needed by occupational therapy support personnel in Canada to meet the varying requirements of workplace settings. This education should be obtained through a formalized training program that identifies competency requirements for the employment setting as guided by the CAOT Practice Profile for Support Personnel in Occupational Therapy and provides learning activities that relate to the actual functions and environment of the job.

**Accountability for occupational therapy service provision:**
Occupational therapists have ultimate responsibility and accountability for occupational therapy service delivery. Occupational therapists ensure the appropriate supervision of support personnel who may carry out assigned components of occupational therapy services. Only occupational therapists can supervise support workers in the execution of occupational therapy services. CAOT does not support regulation of occupational therapy support workers.

**Recommendations for occupational therapists:**

1. Advocate for the appropriate use of occupational therapy support personnel.
2. Understand and demonstrate appropriate supervision and accountability for occupational therapy services provided by support personnel.

©Canadian Association of Occupational Therapist, Ottawa
3. Promote a collaborative intra-disciplinary approach to provision of occupational therapy services.
4. Consider appropriate use and supervision of occupational therapy support personnel in health human resources planning for occupational therapy.

CAOT Initiatives:

CAOT will:
1. Work with relevant stakeholders to conduct human resource studies that inform occupational therapy service delivery and development using support personnel.
2. Ensure the CAOT Practice Profile for Support Personnel in Occupational Therapy remains current for use in Canadian occupational therapy practice settings.
3. Advocate for the participation of occupational therapists in consultations relating to the role and function of Occupational therapists and support personnel in service planning initiatives in all sectors.
4. Develop and administer an academic accreditation process for occupational therapist assistant education programs.

Background
1. Occupational therapists are the primary service providers for occupational therapy. Canadian occupational therapists are graduates of accredited university programs and understand the effects of factors such as disease and injury on the ability of individuals, groups and communities to engage in life’s occupations. Occupational therapists have the required skills and knowledge to provide an evidence-based approach to help others identify, engage in and achieve their desired potential in their occupations.

2. Occupational therapists are regulated in each Canadian province. They are accountable to a provincial regulatory body which has the responsibility of governing the practice of occupational therapy in that jurisdiction. Any existing provincial guidelines and regulations which outline supervisory responsibilities for support personnel should be adhered to at all times.

3. The Guidelines for the Supervision of Assigned Occupational Therapy Components outline supervisory responsibilities of occupational therapists and identifies service components that should not be assigned to support personnel.

4. The CAOT Practice Profile for Support Personnel in Occupational Therapy outline the continuum of knowledge, skills and abilities needed by occupational therapy support personnel in Canada. Three exemplars are described within this continuum, including workers with basic, focused and broad-based competencies. Support personnel with broad-based competencies frequently use the title occupational therapist assistant.
5. A broad array of formal education programs exist for individuals wishing to work as occupational therapy support personnel. Formal education programs are offered for occupational therapist assistants in colleges across Canada. Support personnel may also acquire their competencies through international occupational therapy education programs. Other formal education programs exist in colleges and universities in Canada and internationally that may prepare workers to work in some occupational therapy practice environments.

6. CAOT encourages formal occupational therapist assistant education programs to participate in the academic accreditation process developed and administered by CAOT and the Physiotherapy Education Accreditation Council (PEAC) to validate the quality and outcomes of the program according to national standards.

7. CAOT encourages those who work in a support capacity in occupational therapy to continuously develop skills and knowledge needed to provide safe and effective support services. CAOT provides a range of continuing education programs including an annual conference that are available to support personnel at discounted prices.

8. CAOT believes that studies on occupational therapy and support personnel human resources are needed to shape future occupational therapy services in Canada. Collaborative human resources studies with members, stakeholders, funders, decision-makers and health policy planners are fundamental to the development of new models of service delivery that utilize support personnel appropriately.

Glossary of Terms
Occupation: Groups of activities and tasks of everyday life, named, organized, and given value and meaning by individuals and a culture; everything people do to occupy themselves, including looking after themselves (self-care), enjoying life (leisure) and contributing to the social and economic fabric of their communities (productivity); the domain of concern and the therapeutic medium of occupational therapy (CAOT, 2002); a set of activities that is performed with some consistency and regularity; bring structure and are given meaning by individuals and a culture (adapted from Polatajko et al., 2004, and Zimmerman et al., 2006).

Occupational therapy: is the art and science of enabling engagement in everyday living, through occupation; of enabling people to perform the occupations that foster health and well-being; and of enabling a just and inclusive society so that all people may participate to their potential in the daily occupations of life. (Townsend & Polatajko, 2007)

Occupational therapy support personnel: an individual who is not a qualified occupational therapist but has the job-related competencies to support an occupational therapist to deliver occupational therapy services. Support personnel work within a supervisory relationship with an occupational therapist. Qualified occupational therapist: a qualified individual who is registered or certified by a provincial regulatory body as an occupational therapist or in the absence of a provincial/territorial regulatory
body, meets the requirements for individual membership in the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists.

References


Position statements are on political, ethical and social issues that impact on client welfare, the profession of occupational therapy or CAOT. If they are to be distributed past two years of the publication date, please contact the Director of Professional Practice Tel. (613) 523-2268 or E-mail: practice@caot.ca.

©Canadian Association of Occupational Therapist, Ottawa