



GUIDELINES FOR REGISTRANTS SUPERVISING OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY SUPPORT STAFF

Introduction

Occupational therapy support staff are persons employed to assist occupational therapists in providing an occupational therapy service. Their involvement in occupational therapy programmes enables professional staff to make more efficient and effective use of their own time and skills. Occupational therapists are considered to be in a supervisory relationship with support staff if they either delegate tasks to or line manage support staff.

Support staff are often referred to as aides, assistants or activity supervisors. They may be employed wholly within an occupational therapy service, or may be employed as an allied health assistant, working across several allied health services. It is recommended that these support staff undertake some form of training for these roles such as *Certificate III in Health Service Assistance (Allied Health Assistants)* or in-house training programmes such as the Queensland Health Allied Health Assistants Training. These *Guidelines* are not relevant for those support staff employed solely in an administrative position.

Title

The Occupational Therapists Board of Queensland administers legislation which provides for title protection. The title "occupational therapist" is reserved for individuals registered with the Occupational Therapists Board of Queensland.

Title protection as part of the regulation of a profession is one mechanism used to help the public readily identify those individuals who are registered with the Board and who are subsequently accountable for the delivery of occupational therapy services which meet the established standards of the profession.

The Board takes seriously its role to safeguard public interest by ensuring that only qualified and competent occupational therapists use the title granted on registration. The misuse of the title most frequently occurs when an individual who is not an occupational therapist uses a title or practises in a manner which would lead a reasonable member of the public to presume that he or she is a registered occupational therapist, or when an individual who is practising occupational therapy is not registered with the Board.

Offences under the *Occupational Therapists Registration Act 2001* carry a penalty of up to \$75,000.00.

Support staff responsibilities and supervision requirements

The following advice is given so an aide or assistant is not unwillingly placed in a position which could be described as an offence under the Act or an employer placed in a position of aiding or abetting the offence.

1. Occupational therapy support staff should always work under the supervision of an occupational therapist; and
2. occupational therapy support staff should be directly responsible to either the employing occupational therapist or a designated occupational therapist. In the event of an occupational therapist's absence, provision should be made for an alternative method of supervision. Frequency of supervision may vary according to the complexity of the situation. As complexity could change over time, it is recommended that supervision schedules and frequency are reviewed periodically.

Occupational therapists have a responsibility to ensure:

1. the assistant is clearly and correctly identified as an assistant at all times;
2. the assistant understands the limits of their responsibilities;
3. the assistant is trained to the level appropriate for the tasks required in that facility;
4. the assistant is provided with clear direction as to the work to be undertaken;
5. there are clearly defined lines of communication;
6. the quality of the work of the assistant is regularly evaluated to ensure they are safe, effective, efficient and competent;
7. at no time is an assistant to be requested or required to undertake a task which is outside their competence or cannot be delegated as defined in the guidelines; and
8. occupational therapists retain the ultimate responsibility of the management of their client. It is the responsibility of the occupational therapist to delegate appropriately to the assistant and the responsibility of the assistant to only accept delegated tasks within their capability



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- 3 Occupational therapy support staff should be aware of the importance of the following:
 - 3.1 respect for the rights and dignity of clients;
 - 3.2 need for liaison and open communication with the treating therapist;
 - 3.3 confidentiality;
 - 3.4 standards of personal conduct;
 - 3.5 responsibility in only undertaking tasks within limits of competence;
 - 3.6 standards of care appropriate for the facility; and
 - 3.7 penalties for using the title “occupational therapist” when not registered as such.
- 4 The following activities should not be the responsibility of support staff:
 - 4.1 interpreting referrals;
 - 4.2 conducting initial interviews with clients;
 - 4.3 undertaking and interpreting assessment procedures – the occupational therapist may delegate some screening or informal observational activities for the assistant to undertake but the assessment process is the overall responsibility of the occupational therapist;
 - 4.4 developing or modifying goals for treatment and treatment plans;
 - 4.5 formally recording patient progress in patient records unless permitted by departmental policy and assessed as competent to do so;
 - 4.6 giving interpretive information to clients, relatives or other staff; or
 - 4.7 discharge planning.

References

Policy: Occupational Therapy Support Staff, Council of Occupational Therapists Registration Boards (Australia and New Zealand) Inc, 2005.

Allied Health Assistants Supervision and Training (draft) Queensland Health, 2005.

Scope of Practice: Framework for Nurses and Midwives , Queensland Nursing Council, 2005.

