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GUIDELINES FOR RE-ENTRY INTO THE FIELD OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

BACKGROUND

The Commission on Continuing Competence and Professional Development (CCCPD) is the body within the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) which oversees the Standards for Continuing Competence and supports professional development. In 2009, the AOTA Representative Assembly charged the CCCPD to develop guidelines for return to practice (reentry) (RA2009 #141). These guidelines do not represent AOTA membership requirements and do not supersede state licensure requirements that may be in place.

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDELINES

These guidelines are designed to assist occupational therapy practitioners who have chosen to return to the profession and deliver occupational therapy services. These guidelines represent minimum recommendations and are designed to support practitioners in meeting their ethical obligations to "continually maintain high standards of competence" (AOTA, 2005a, p. 640). The guidelines are based on a three-tiered system determined by the number of years away from occupational therapy service delivery. Formal learning activities, observation of service delivery, and mentoring time should be within 24 months prior to re-entry in order to obtain the most current knowledge in the field.

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

Re-Entry – Re-entering occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants are individuals who:

- have practiced in the field for a minimum of 1 year (Individuals who have practiced for less than one year are considered entry-level.)
- chosen not to provide occupational therapy client services , and
- wish to return to the profession in the capacity of delivering occupational therapy services to clients

Formal Learning – Refers to any learning that has already established goals and objectives that are measured. This can include activities such as:

- Attending workshops, seminars, lectures, and professional conferences.
- Auditing formal academic coursework.
- Participating in external self-study series (e.g., AOTA Self-Paced Clinical Course)
- Participating in formal academic coursework.
- Participating in independent distance learning CE (e.g., CE articles, video, audio, and/or online courses) with already established goals and objectives that are measured.
- Participating in interactive distance learning CE with already established goals and objectives that are measured.

SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR RE-ENTRY

Less Than 3 Years Out of Practice

1. Complete a self-assessment using the AOTA Professional Development Tool (PDT) (need to cite this) and a professional development plan that addresses the AOTA Standards for Continuing Competence (AOTA, 2005b)
2. Attend a minimum of 8 hours formal learning related to occupational therapy service delivery for each year out of practice.

3 – 8 Years Out of Practice

1. Complete a self-assessment using the AOTA PDT and a professional development plan that addresses the AOTA Standards for Continuing Competence.
2. Attend a minimum of 30 hours formal learning related to occupational therapy service delivery within the past 24 months.
3. Acquire core knowledge of the profession of occupational therapy and the responsibilities of occupational therapy practitioners that are consistent with material found in AOTA official documents such as the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework, Code of Ethics, Standards for Continuing Competence, Standards of Practice, and Guidelines for Supervision.
4. Complete a minimum of 30 hours of documented observation of service delivery or mentoring in occupational therapy within the 24 months prior to anticipated reentry.

- a. Specific goals and objectives should be established for the 30 hours by the re-entering practitioner in conjunction with the OT practitioner(s) being observed/serving as the mentor(s).
- b. The observation/mentoring experience should focus on the area of practice to which the practitioner intends to return.
- c. Observation should occur with a practitioner at the same or greater professional level.

Greater than 8 Years Out of Practice

1. Complete a self-assessment using the AOTA PDT and a professional development plan that addresses the AOTA Standards for Continuing Competence.
2. Attend a minimum of 30 hours formal learning related to occupational therapy service delivery within the past 24 months.
3. Acquire core knowledge of the profession of occupational therapy and the responsibilities of occupational therapy practitioners that is consistent with material found in AOTA official documents such as the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework, Code of Ethics, Standards for Continuing Competence, Standards of Practice, and Guidelines for Supervision.
4. Complete a minimum of 30 hours of documented observation of occupational service delivery or mentoring in occupational therapy within the 24 months prior to anticipated reentry.
 - a. Specific goals and objectives should be established for the 30 hours by the re-entering practitioner in conjunction with the OT practitioner(s) being observed/serving as the mentor(s).

- b. The observation/mentoring experience should focus on the area of practice to which the practitioner intends to return.
 - c. Observation should occur with a practitioner at the same or greater professional level.

5. Engage in a formal education program that is:
 - a. the equivalent of 6 academic credit hours, and
 - b. includes a supervised field experience component, ideally in the area to which the practitioner intends to return.

ONGOING CONTINUING COMPETENCE

Once practitioners have successfully returned to the delivery of occupational therapy services, they are encouraged to engage in activities that support them in their ongoing continuing competence, such as:

- Seeking mentoring, consultation, or supervision; especially during the first year of return to practice.
- Engaging in relevant AOTA Special Interest Section forums in order to build a professional network and facilitate opportunities for practice guidance.
- Exploring relevant AOTA Board and Specialty Certifications and to use the identified competencies and criteria as a blueprint for ongoing professional development.
- Joining and becoming active in both AOTA and their state occupational therapy association.

REFERENCES & RESOURCES

American Occupational Therapy Association. (2004). Guidelines for supervision, roles, and responsibilities during the delivery of occupational therapy services. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 58*, 663–667.

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