

## **CAOT announces new educational requirement for academic accreditation effective 2008.**

The Board of Directors of the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) announced on November 28, 2001 that a professional Master's degree will be the minimum entry requirement to the profession in Canada as of 2010. Effective 2008, CAOT will only grant academic accreditation to those occupational therapy educational programs that lead to a professional Master's degree in occupational therapy\* as the entry credential.

### Fact #1

The decision to grant academic accreditation only to programs that lead to a professional Master's degree in occupational therapy is based on the need for beginning occupational therapists to have advanced skills and knowledge.

This decision comes after extensive consultation with members and other stakeholders on the issue of the education of occupational therapists. A significant finding of the consultation undertaken by CAOT was the recognition that what were once considered requirements for advanced practice are now essential for beginning occupational therapists. Changes in the demographics of the clientele, funding for services in health and education, increased opportunities for private sector practice, as well as developments in self-regulation of the profession require greater accountability and have a major impact on the practice of occupational therapy. Upon entry into the profession, occupational therapists need to be prepared for autonomous practice, provision of evidence-based service and have the competencies to market their services in an expanding and competitive global environment. This is true now and will be increasingly more important within the next ten years.

### Fact #2

CAOT recognizes that experienced occupational therapists with Baccalaureate degrees and beginning occupational therapists with a professional Master's degree in occupational therapy are equally qualified professionals.

It is expected that both experienced occupational therapists with Baccalaureate degrees and beginning occupational therapists with a professional Master's degree have acquired the competencies for their professional roles and functions as described in the Profile of Occupational Therapy Practice in Canada 2nd Edition (Profile 2nd Edition) (in press). Both are the primary providers of occupational therapy services and may provide direct services not only to individuals but may also perform functions as manager, researcher, program developer, educator or as part of other professional roles. All occupational therapists are expected to pursue continuing professional education to maintain excellence in their practice and to ensure that their level of achievement is consistent with the Profile 2nd Edition (in press).

### Fact #3

Requirements for individual membership in CAOT remain unchanged.

Criteria for individual membership in CAOT include the following:

Graduation from an accredited university program in occupational therapy in Canada or a program in occupational therapy recognized by the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT), regardless of the degree conferred, 1000 hours of supervised fieldwork experience as part of the educational program, and Successful completion of the CAOT certification examination.

A waiver to this requirement may be considered for occupational therapists who have an academic appointment in a Canadian University Program or who have supervised an occupational therapy student in a FESAP approved site

### Fact #4

CAOT academic accreditation requirements for the qualification of fieldwork educators for occupational therapy students remain unchanged.

CAOT supports and promotes fieldwork education for occupational therapy students.

CAOT recognizes that Master's graduates, like their colleagues with Baccalaureate degrees or diplomas, are eligible to provide fieldwork education of students after one year of full-time practice and registration with their provincial regulatory organization.

### Fact #5

Graduates with a professional Master's are needed to address the shortage of occupational therapists in Canada.

There is a current shortage of occupational therapists in Canada (CAOT, 2001). A move to a professional Master's degree as the minimum entry requirement to the profession will provide entry-level graduates that meet workforce demands for occupational therapy knowledge and skills. Master's graduates will be prepared to easily integrate into the existing workforce as well as work in emerging areas of practice.

### Fact #6

CAOT will continue to advocate on behalf of Canadian occupational therapists to advance excellence in occupational therapy.

In keeping with our mission of advancing excellence in occupational therapy, CAOT will address the importance of continuing and higher education for occupational therapists through a multipronged advocacy approach. In addition to ongoing activities in distance and face to face continuing professional education, CAOT will represent member interests to university programs for access to upgrading, and opportunities for advanced standing. CAOT will advocate for the development of doctoral programs in occupational therapy, as occupational therapists at the doctoral level are required for the education of occupational therapists and for the generation of research in the occupational therapy profession. CAOT will continue to monitor workforce information to advocate for an adequate supply of occupational therapists and promote high quality innovative and well-integrated occupational therapy services to Canadians. CAOT is committed to promote the value of occupational therapy and strategically advocate for greater access to publicly and privately funded services in health, education, industry, and community sectors.

## Background

Occupational therapists enable individuals, groups and communities to develop the means and opportunities to identify, engage in and achieve their desired potential in the occupations of life. These occupations include 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). Occupational therapists are regulated health professionals in each Canadian province. CAOT promotes quality educational programs through its accreditation program. All university occupational therapy programs in Canada are accredited by CAOT. The Baccalaureate degree in occupational therapy was the minimum educational requirement for entry-level occupational therapy education in Canada, set by CAOT in 1986.

Changes in practice and education influenced the review of the entry to profession standard for occupational therapists. CAOT hosted a professional issues forum at our national conference (CAOT, 2001) as well as conducted stakeholder and membership surveys, and focus groups in conjunction with a project to revise and revalidate the Profile of Occupational Therapy Practice in Canada (CAOT, 1996). The Profile (1996) is a landmark document that presents a model of excellence in practice for occupational therapists now and into the future. Like the original version, the second edition of the Profile (in press) outlines the competencies and provides the standards for the accreditation of education programs in Canada that in turn, provide guidance for the development of curricula and certification examinations.

This multi-stakeholder review of occupational therapy practice in Canada indicated that advanced skills and knowledge are now expected for beginning occupational therapists such as those associated with greater accountability for practice decisions and professional autonomy. Funders, consumers and employers are demanding services that are cost-effective, highly valued for their social and health outcomes and represent best practice.

The first Master's entry program in occupational therapy in Canada was introduced at the University of Western Ontario in 1998. Since this date, several other university occupational therapy programs across Canada have developed graduate entry programs as well.

The American Occupational Therapy Association has mandated the move within the United States to the Master's entry requirement as an academic accreditation requirement by 2006. This decision will affect occupational therapists in Canada since they will be part of a common North American market for occupational therapy.

## References

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