



NOVA SCOTIA SOCIETY OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS

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February 2, 2008

Dear Mr. MacFarlane,

I am writing in response to your letter dated January 25, 2008 and on behalf of the Nova Scotia Society of Occupational Therapists. Of the approximate 370 therapists who practice within our province, 16% of these therapists work within dedicated mental health practices in Nova Scotia.

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 have worked in the area of mental health in our province since the early 1920's. While I am unfamiliar with your particular work situation or experience collaborating with other disciplines, as a former resident of Nova Scotia I think that you would agree that access to services is limited in many aspects of health and community care, especially as it relates to mental health practices. Without access to Occupational Therapists many residents may be unaware of the particular role and profession.

In your letter you identified specific concerns related to Occupational Therapists working in mental health, a) scope of practice and b) educational background. I would like to respond to these specific concerns.

- a) Occupational Therapy Scope of Practice: All practicing Occupational Therapists are regulated by the College of Occupational Therapists of Nova Scotia, a governing body established by the provincial government to regulate the practice of Occupational Therapy in our province. The mandate of the college is to protect the public interest by setting standards for practice, establishing programs to ensure that Occupational Therapists practice safely and competently, and through investigating concerns raised about registrants' practices. Any therapist who is found working outside of their scope of practice can risk suspension, reprimand, and loss of licensure.
- b) Qualifications: CAOT believes that advanced skills and knowledge are expected for entry level Occupational Therapists, such as those associated with greater accountability for professional decisions and for autonomous practice in diverse environments with multicultural populations. CAOT will only grant academic accreditation to occupational therapy University programs that lead to a professional Master's degree in Occupational Therapy as the entry credential. All graduating therapists must also complete a minimum of 1000 hours of supervised fieldwork experience (on-the-job training), in a combination of physical and mental

health placements. All Occupational Therapists in NS are responsible for maintaining a continuing competency portfolio which demonstrates ongoing education within their area of practice.

Occupational Therapy mental health practice recognizes that everyday occupational engagement influences mental and physical health. Occupational Therapists believe that occupational performance, organization, choice and satisfaction are determined by the relationship between persons and their environments (CAOT, 2002). Occupational Therapists approach mental health with this unique perspective that considers a person's needs context of family and community. A client-centered philosophy is consistent with the cornerstone of Canada's mental health reform, which views consumers and families as critical partners in planning, delivering and evaluating mental health care services (Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, 1997). The Canadian Association has been involved in a number of initiatives toward advancing collaborative mental health involving primary care providers, mental health care providers, consumers, families, and communities. For more information: www.CAOT.ca.

It is the position of Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) and the Nova Scotia Society of Occupational Therapists that Occupational Therapy is a core component of an integrated mental health system. Occupational Therapy's understanding of the relationship among person, occupation, and environment uniquely positions the profession to provide quality mental health services in environments where people live and work. Should you be interested in further discussion around Occupational Therapy and mental health practice I would be happy to speak with you in person or provide you with a clinician who can further respond to your specific practice related questions.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Kelly
Executive Director
Nova Scotia Society of Occupational Therapists