INTRODUCTION

Support personnel are widely used in occupational therapy services throughout New Brunswick. The New Brunswick Association of Occupational Therapists (NBAOT) endorses this practice as a means of expanding public access to occupational therapy services by allowing occupational therapists to better utilize their professional skills. Standardization is lacking, however, in the training, supervision, role and job-title of support personnel.

TRAINING OF SUPPORT PERSONNEL

NBAOT endorses the development of a formalized educational programme to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out support services in occupational therapy competently and safely. Collaboration with other rehabilitation disciplines is viewed as a cost-effective means of providing training for support personnel, and acknowledges the growing trend toward interdisciplinary practice. NBAOT strongly recommends that a training programme meet the following criteria.

- The curriculum is harmonized with a competency profile for occupational therapy support personnel, with the result that graduates are adequately prepared for entry-level practice as a support worker in occupational therapy
- An educator who is an occupational therapist is on faculty to plan, manage and deliver occupational therapy specific courses
- The training programme is available in both official languages
- Distance education methods are utilized to increase accessibility and decrease costs for students
- Fieldwork education is required in an accredited occupational therapy service prior to employment in the provision of support services in occupational therapy

ROLE

NBAOT recognizes that the role of support personnel varies according to the occupational therapy service provided as well as the experience and competency of the support worker. Support services may take place in any setting in which occupational therapy services are provided, including, but not limited to health care facilities, schools, homes, community settings, seniors facilities, daycare centres or businesses. The following recommendations are supported by NBAOT.
- Tasks are delegated to support personnel in occupational therapy only at the discretion of a qualified occupational therapist.
- The occupational therapist has ascertained that the assistant is competent to provide the service assigned.
- The rehabilitation assistant acknowledges accountability to the occupational therapist.
- Clients are informed that certain components of their occupational therapy service is being provided by someone who is not an occupational therapist.
- Supervision is available to the extent required.
- Delegation of a task to support personnel will not compromise quality and outcome of the occupational therapy service.
- Support personnel should not be assigned tasks which require interpretation of findings, continuous clinical judgment, intervention planning, discharge decisions or any intervention believed by the occupational therapist to be beyond their capability.

SUPERVISION

All support personnel in occupational therapy require supervision which:
- Is ongoing.
- Involves regular face to face contact with the supervising therapist.
- May utilize a combination of methods such as direct observation, record reviews, electronic/telephone communication, feedback from other professionals, informal or formal meetings with the rehabilitation assistant.

NBAOT recommends that each occupational therapy service in which support personnel are employed develop written guidelines for supervision, taking into account the complexity of tasks delegated, the needs of the client population, the physical proximity of the rehabilitation assistant to the supervising occupational therapist and the competencies of the support personnel. Further, it is recommended that a ratio be determined by each occupational therapy service establishing the maximum number of support personnel that can safely be supervised by one occupational therapist. The frequency of face to face contact may be daily, but should in no case be less than once per month.

Where an occupational therapist is not available to provide the level of supervision stipulated in the guidelines for the service, support personnel may not work. Transfer to another service or lay-off may be required until the vacant occupational therapy position is filled.

REGULATION

Support personnel in occupational therapy are encouraged to become associate members of NBAOT, to facilitate access to educational opportunities and resources, and to promote networking with others who are working in the field of occupational therapy. However, NBAOT
does not support regulation of support personnel, as it is occupational therapists who have ultimate responsibility for occupational therapy service delivery.

REFERENCES
