



Occupational Therapists as Home Care Case Managers

Occupational Therapy

Case management is effective in controlling cost and maximizing outcomes and is not discipline specific. Occupational therapists are graduates of accredited university educational programs and are self-regulated in all provinces. Occupational therapists have the competencies to perform the functions of case manager. The competencies required for a case manager are embedded within the *Profile of Occupational Therapy Practice in Canada (Profile)*.¹ The *Profile* provides an overall description of the general competencies required of occupational therapists in their various functions.

Definition of case management

Case management is a collaborative process during which a case manager "assesses, plans, implements, coordinates, monitors, and evaluates options and services to meet an individual's health needs through communication and available resources to promote quality cost-effective outcomes."²

Roles of a case manager

In addition to co-ordinating services, case managers analyze the fiscal benefits of services, advocate for essential services on the part of clients, advise client, family and caregivers regarding and monitor the use of resources.³ They provide encouragement, support and feedback to clients, their families, payers and employers. Case managers support clients' developing abilities to advocate and manage their own care.⁴ They ensure that individuals have the necessary support to prevent unnecessary hospitalization or institutionalization.⁵

Models of case management

There are different models of case management. Case managers may act as a broker of the services for the client but do not personally provide any service.⁵ In others, the case manager acts as the main service provider, having been selected to manage the case because of the fit between the client's major issues and the case manager's skills and professional training. Other services are called in as necessary.⁶

Findings of outcome studies for case management and occupational therapy

Evidence – Occupational therapists have effectively worked as case managers

- The development of the role of the home care case manager was led by occupational therapists in the Coordinated Home Care Programs of Alberta.⁷

- An occupational therapist provides case management in the SIPA (Systèmes de services integres pour personnes âgées en perte d'autonomie) demonstration project. It concludes that occupational therapists have the necessary competencies to fill this role.⁸
- In the United Kingdom, occupational therapists provide case management for persons with a developmental disability on teams where health and social services are integrated. They also provide case management on community mental health and primary care teams for older adults.⁵

Evidence – Occupational therapy is a valuable discipline to provide case management.

- Occupational therapy education ensures practitioners are able to provide a comprehensive assessment of skills, deficits, environmental demands and available resources.³
- Occupational therapists' appreciation of cognitive difficulties makes them particularly skilled in case management with individuals with a mental health disability as well as dementia-related problems.³
- Occupational therapists can help to facilitate a continuum of care from the acute hospital setting to the community by emphasizing abilities to manage independently in the community.⁹ They are particularly good at identifying system barriers to recovery.¹⁰
- Research has demonstrated that Canadian employers of occupational therapists working in community mental health, value occupational therapists' holistic approach, and their client-centred, practical and outcome oriented focus.¹⁰
- Return to work is a growing area of managed care. Occupational therapists provide excellent case management services to individuals with problems involving physical and/or mental health barriers to return to work.⁴

Evidence – Case management is an effective method of delivering care

- In home care, intensification of case management activities for frail older clients results in decreased primary care physicians visits, emergency departments visits, hospital admissions, hospital length of stay, use of



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hospital stay for awaiting placement and admission to residential care.^{10,11,12,13} Case management is also associated with increased inpatient and caregiver satisfaction.⁸

Evidence – Case management is not limited to a specific discipline

- Case management services may be provided by a variety of professionals.^{3,4,14}
- Where case management certification bodies exist, a professional degree or diploma in any area of health and human service is a minimal requirement.^{12,13}
- The Commission for Case Managers Certification requires the case manager candidate to have previous professional certification or licence that allows the case manager to independently practise without the supervision of another health professional. Furthermore, the case managers' education must prepare them to perform six main functions of case management: assessment, planning, implementation, coordination, monitoring and evaluation. Occupational therapists meet these criteria.⁴

Evidence – The required skill set determined by Ontario Case Managers' Association (OCMA) for a case manager is embedded in occupational therapy education. This includes:

- case management theory and principles,
- community health perspectives,
- communication technologies,
- roles and parameters of other health and social science disciplines,
- community and institutional resources,
- the aging process'
- disease, disability,
- working knowledge of clinical care and treatment options,
- human behaviour and development,
- thanatology,
- family dynamics,
- cultural norms and variances,
- ethical and legal issues,
- current legislation as it relates to service delivery in the community
- program and policy development,
- cost containment strategies,
- quality management.¹⁵



These subject areas are covered in occupational therapy university educational programs in Canada through academic and fieldwork education.

In addition, case management requires effective communication skills, respect for diversity, conflict resolution and negotiating skills, crisis management skills, the ability to act as a life span coordinator (i.e. being able to project future care and responsibilities of the person who is ill or injured), critical thinking, leadership, resource management, and skills in educating, as well as autonomy, clinical skills, and organizational ability.^{4,9,14,15}

Occupational therapy education programs include and promote all these competencies.

Getting to the root of the problem – An occupational therapy case history

Occupational therapists who work as case managers can assist people to have a life that is more than simply living but is also meaningful.

Mrs. Babinski was a 77-year-old widow who lived alone. She required oxygen due to emphysema. When she called her local community health centre to get help with bathing, she received a visit from occupational therapist Elaine McKee. Fortunately, Elaine was skilled not only in assisting individuals regain their functional independence, she also proved to be an excellent case manager.

Elaine quickly learned that Mrs. Babinski had worked many years as a pastry chef. Over the last several years she had become increasingly disabled. For three years she had been unable to leave the house, and could no longer get out to see her doctor. She believed that this decline was an inevitable part of living with emphysema.

Elaine learned that Mrs. Babinski had become unable to cook for herself over the two months. However, she had enlisted the help of neighbours, by offering to buy their groceries if they prepared the food and shared it with her.

Elaine noted a strong smell of urine in the apartment. Apparently, Mrs. Babinski was unable to get to the bathroom in time and had started wearing incontinence pads. Due to increasing difficulty breathing, Mrs. Babinski was now sleeping in her recliner chair. She could not locate a family doctor who made house calls. She had been relying on a doctors' visiting service to renew her prescriptions, but they were becoming reluctant to continue to do this for her.

The occupational therapist quickly determined that what seemed like a simple, protracted problem, the inability to get in and out of the shower, was just one symp-



tom of severe frailty brought on by untreated medical conditions. She returned within the week with a geriatrician. This physician diagnosed congestive heart failure and skin rashes. She was admitted to hospital and stabilized.

Mrs. Babinski was able to get out to see her new family doctor, and resume many of her previous activities, including cooking and showering after treatment for her congestive heart failure. She was provided with a proper walker, portable oxygen tank and occupational therapy intervention that included techniques to ensure that she conserved energy in her daily activities.

Mrs. Babinski recalls the time before Elaine's visit with difficulty. "It seemed as though I didn't live on earth at all during that time," she stated. "I had just about reached rock bottom and as far as my health was concerned, you saved my life." 17

This scenario demonstrates that occupational therapists possess the education, expertise and orientation to provide case management services to individuals of all ages with a mental or physical health problem.



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