

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists Recommendations of the Workforce Integration Project



International occupational therapy graduates often find it difficult to practise in Canada and face barriers to entering the occupational therapy workforce. At the same time, there is high demand for occupational therapists throughout Canada.

The Workforce Integration Project is an 18-month initiative to identify issues that enable or hinder international graduates to integrate into the Canadian occupational therapy workforce. Funded by the Government of Canada Foreign Credential Recognition Program, the project has been led by the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) since May 2005 and will conclude October 2006.

Information for the project was gathered in four phases:

- Analysis of research literature, organizational records and policy documents;
- Consultations with regulators, educators and professional associations, employers and provincial settlement agencies;
- A survey of international occupational therapy graduates registered to practise in Canada over the previous five years;
- Personal interviews with international occupational therapy graduates.

Based on the findings of the project, the following recommendations were developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders:

Coordinate and centralize professional registration requirements and processes

Many Canadian organizations are involved in assessing competency for practice. Coordinating and centralizing requirements and processes is necessary to make it easier and more efficient to register as an occupational therapist.

Improve national certification examination access, preparation resources and assistance

A plain-language version of the examination is scheduled to be introduced in 2007. CAOT is also exploring a computer-based certification examination and online resources for international graduates.

Provide clear and accessible information to help international graduates to work in Canada

International graduates requested a centralized source of information about how to immigrate and register for practice in Canada. Resources are also needed to assist international graduates to understand occupational therapy practice within the context of health and social systems in Canada. CAOT plans to add a new section to its web site which will link to other organizations providing services to international graduates.

Increase opportunities for academic upgrading and language training

University occupational therapy programs have expressed interest in offering upgrading courses for international graduates. Existing programs in Quebec and Alberta can inform the development of such new programs.

Help international graduates connect with employers, occupational therapists and professional resources

International graduates need better support and resources, such as mentoring programs, regional professional association meetings, online job listings, opportunities for job shadowing, volunteering or supervised practice, and continuing education courses.

Advocate the need for internationally educated occupational therapists in Canada

Advocacy is required to inform government officials of the need to fast-track immigration applications of international occupational therapy graduates for regions of Canada experiencing shortages of occupational therapists.

Promote a diverse workforce for quality occupational therapy services

Internationally educated occupational therapists play an important role in meeting rising demands for occupational therapy services in Canada. In addition, they offer innovation and diversity needed for a flexible workforce that can provide service to clients with differing social, cultural and language backgrounds. Unfortunately experiences reported in this project indicated that international graduates do not always feel welcome in Canada. The Workforce Integration Project report will be shared with organizations involved with internationally educated occupational therapists to encourage ongoing evaluation and improvement of practices and services for international graduates.

For more information

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