



CAOT Position Statement

Tele-health and Tele-occupational therapy

Occupational Therapy

Background

Health professionals are challenged by Canada's vast geography and uneven population distribution to meet the five principles of the Canada Health Act - accessibility, universality, comprehensiveness, portability and public administration (Government of Canada, 1984). With the advancement of technology and reduced communication costs, it is now feasible to deliver health care services and education across large and small geographical distances through "tele-health" (Miyazaki, Liu & McCracken, 1996; Miyazaki & Liu, 1997; Miyazaki & Liu, 1998).

Tele-health is the delivery of healthcare services and education at a distance via the use of communications and information technologies. The first Tele-health Centre in Canada was established at the University of Alberta in February 1996 (Liu & Miyazaki, 1999; Miyazaki, Liu & Kovacs, 1998). Tele-health is broadly defined and includes various professional domains such as Telemedicine, Telenursing, Teledentistry and Telepharmacy. There are also health service specific terms such as: Telepsychiatry; Teleradiology; Teledermatology; and Telehomecare. Tele-occupational therapy is the remote delivery of occupational therapy services and education through communication and information technologies.

There are three major reports that have confirmed that knowledge, evidence and information will be central to the health services and systems of the future. A key agent of change in the transition to this future will be information and communications technologies, or ICT. (Canadian Network for the Advancement of Research, Industry and Education (CANARIE), 1997).

1. The Information Highway Advisory Council (IHAC) made several recommendations for the creation of a health information infrastructure in Canada in its report *The Challenge of the Information Highway* (1995). Health was seen to be one of the key application areas of the information highway, enabling significant cost savings in the delivery of health care while improving the quality of health for Canadians.
2. The Canadian Network for the Advancement of Research, Industry and Education (CANARIE) released its report *Towards a Canadian Health lway: (CHI): Vision, Opportunities and Future Steps* in 1996. CHI is described as a virtual 'information centre', created and used by communities and individuals across

Canada. It will: support research and training and facilitate management of the health system; respond to the health information needs of the public; and contribute to improving the health of Canadians.

3. The National Forum on Health released its final report in February 1997, *Canada Health Action: Building on the Legacy*. The report included a number of recommendations regarding the future of Canada's health system. It outlined the basic concept of Canada's health system, with a shift in emphasis away from health care and towards the broader concept of health itself. This included key determinants of health, such as socioeconomic conditions and education about healthy lifestyles, and the adoption of an evidence-based system. This evidence based system was defined as "the systematic application of the best available evidence to the evaluation of options and to decision making in clinical, management and policy settings".

The report also called for federal leadership in this area through the development of a nation-wide, population-health information system.

The Position of CAOT

CAOT supports the objectives of the Canada Health Act (1984) and the CANARIE Report (1997) which outlined CHI. CAOT recognizes that Tele-health, and specifically with the development of Tele-occupational therapy, will offer unlimited opportunities for effective, efficient and accessible occupational therapy services to all Canadians. The growth and sustainability of Tele-occupational therapy is closely linked to high standards of professional service delivery and good partnerships that work together toward successful Tele-health systems.

CAOT represents over 6000 graduates of occupational therapy educational programs. Its role as the Canadian national professional association, is to provide its members with information that support excellence in professional leadership, education, service delivery, practice advancement and research within the evolving "Tele-occupational therapy" environment.

Therefore CAOT will:

1. Develop guidelines for use of information and telecommunications technologies that will enable members to deliver effective Tele-occupational therapy services.
2. Collaborate with occupational therapy stakeholders to address the issues asso-



ciated with remote consultations and supervision of support personnel.

3. Promote best Tele-occupational therapy practice by encouraging partnerships among service and system providers, suppliers of technological innovation, and consumers.
4. Facilitate the dissemination of evidence-based knowledge through CAOT publications and continuing professional education activities to sustain successful Tele-occupational therapy in Canada and globally.

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