

## “Taking an active role in my health and safety at work”: An illustration of community occupational therapy practice in the promotion of workplace health

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Occupational therapists play a leading role in workplace health. Scientific literature suggests that occupational therapy interventions in this area of practice are primarily in the rehabilitation of injured workers (Kollee et al., 2013). However, the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists encourages its members to become more involved in primary prevention and workplace health promotion (CAOT, 2015). With the aim of taking a proactive approach against occupational hazards, the purpose of this article is to illustrate how occupational therapists can intervene with the promotion of workplace health. For this purpose, this article presents a project carried out by occupational therapists using a population-based approach with clientele emerging from the community: students learning a trade.

### Project

The “Taking an active role in my health and safety at work” project is part of a broader study focused on the health of apprenticeship students in vocational training programs. This project arose from a need reported by teachers of a

hairdressing program, during interviews being conducted on students’ workplace health. Teachers expressed the desire for resources that were better adapted to the reality of their profession in order to improve the teachings they offer to students regarding workplace health. In order to meet this need, a collaboration between the training setting and a team of occupational therapy researchers was formed. The challenge was daunting. It was imperative that they combine the occupational therapist’s expertise in analyzing the activity - adapting to the environment and empowering people in prevention strategies - and the competencies of the teacher, gained through experiential learning.

### Approach

Based on the premises of an occupational therapy model for promoting health (Moll et al., 2015), the theoretical principles of designing learning activities (Paillé, 2007) and the steps of a worker training process (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2007), the team developed three 60-minute training workshops. These

Table 1  
Description of training workshops

Competencies	Contents specific to the trade	Learning modalities
<b>Workshop 1</b>		
Understanding how my body works and recognizing the symptoms of health problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and safety statistics specific to the hairdressing profession</li> <li>• Knowledge of anatomy/physiology</li> <li>• Concepts of ergonomics</li> <li>• Symptoms of health problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture-based training</li> <li>• Working in sub-groups</li> <li>• Self-assessment questionnaire/individual reflection</li> <li>• Case history</li> <li>• Discussion and exchange as a large group</li> </ul>
<b>Workshop 2</b>		
Detecting and preventing risks to health or safety at work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risks to health or safety specific to the hairdressing profession</li> <li>• Analysis of a work situation</li> <li>• Strategies to reduce risk (e.g., modifying work technique, adapting to the environment)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual risk analysis of a work situation</li> <li>• Workshop simulation</li> <li>• Team observation</li> <li>• Using photos and videos</li> <li>• Presentation of before/after work situations</li> <li>• Testing strategies to reduce risk</li> </ul>
<b>Workshop 3</b>		
Maintaining my health at work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importance of reporting identified risks to health or safety in a work situation and advocating for change</li> <li>• Occupational balance, time use, life schedule</li> <li>• Stress management</li> <li>• Prevention of risks to health or safety in out-of-work activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture-based training</li> <li>• Integration of workshop learning through exercises</li> <li>• Testimony on the consequences of work-related injuries or illnesses</li> <li>• Presentation of prevention tools (e.g., warm-up exercises related to the trade)</li> </ul>

workshops promoted the empowerment of students, based on the principles of prevention and promotion of workplace health. They focused on analyzing the risks of a work situation, integrating strategies to reduce occupational risks, stress management, and occupational balance related to life at work. The presentation of case histories, group discussions, self-assessment exercises and workshop simulations were among the various pedagogical modalities used. Table 1 provides a brief description of the characteristics of each of the training workshops. The competencies, content, and learning modalities of the workshops were approved by a committee comprised of an occupational therapist, a teacher, a representative of the health and safety committee of the institution, and a pedagogical counsellor. The training workshops were facilitated by an occupational therapist and a teacher.

### Impact

The collaboration between occupational therapists and the community was a positive experience for all participants. On one hand, occupational therapists developed new expertise in workplace health promotion, as an emerging practice. On the other hand, teachers felt better equipped to approach workplace health with students; and the latter reported that they were more conscious of this facet of their future jobs. The project was so well received by the training community that the workshops developed under this initiative are now part of the regular curriculum! In addition, similar projects are

underway in other vocational training programs in the country. In conclusion, this initiative demonstrated that occupational therapists have the skills required to promote the health of the working population, and that they can help to positively transform their community by working with local partners. Indeed, the collaboration between the occupational therapist and the vocational training environment has enabled apprenticeship students to take active roles in their health and safety at work!

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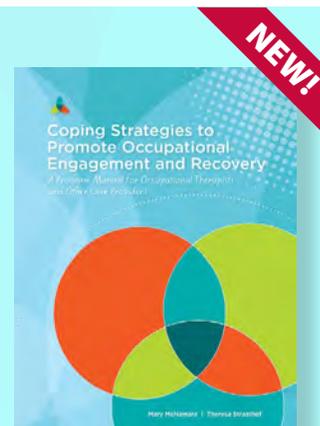
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