

ENTRY/RE-ENTRY TO OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PRACTICE IN ONTARIO

CONSIDERATIONS IN SECURING A SUPERVISED CLINICAL PLACEMENT

1. **Practicing OT in Ontario**

International graduates interested in practising occupational therapy in the province of Ontario or occupational therapists interested in returning to practice after extended leaves are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the resources of the Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists' website regarding [practice in Ontario](#).

2. **College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario Requirements**

As OT practice in the province is regulated by the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario, applicants for registration should be in touch with the College to commence the registration process. For information for international graduates see <http://www.coto.org/registration/international.asp>. The College will review applications and determine the needs for applicants to undertake additional components (eg. Supervised fieldwork experience, language testing, etc.)

3. **OSOT Consultation Services to support Re-entry to practice**

Should the College require a supervised clinical fieldwork component to meet eligibility criteria, candidates are encouraged to contact OSOT (osot@osot.on.ca /416-322-3011/877-676-6768) for limited consultation on the following;

- Overview of organization of OT services in Ontario
- Strategies for securing a supervised fieldwork placement
- Marketing/positioning your skills to potential fieldwork sites
- Targeting your search – how to find organizations, contact information, etc.
- Securing *Accident Replacement Insurance* if required.

This consultation may be telephone based or may occur in the OSOT Office in Toronto. Typically a one hour discussion is scheduled.

4. **Reviewing and Preparing your Resume and Cover Letters**

Review your resume and cover letter to ensure that they represent you well and highlight your past OT experience (employers, dates, roles) as well as any more recent non-OT but health care related work (employer, dates, roles). Ensure you include any professional activities, associations, relevant continuing education you can to give potential supervisors a clear sense of how you have made efforts to develop professionally and keep abreast of OT practice.

Ensure your cover letter, clearly states what you are asking for, all that you have to offer, and your interest to follow-up in person to discuss this further. A cover letter is important because even if you make a more personal contact by phone to start a conversation, you **MUST** be ready to follow-up with a quality mailing or email with your cover letter and resume as attachments. There is nothing more impressive and assuring that someone is really serious about exploring an option to work with you than if you have talked and asked them to forward something (or they say they are going to forward something) and it comes within the hour! It shows that you're prepared, organized, and professional.

You may wish to modify your cover letter slightly to speak to each specific organization. For example if you are sending it to a pediatric facility, you'll want to emphasize your background in this area.

5. **Preparing to search for a Re-entry Placement**

Entry to practice candidates are encouraged to consider the following to focus their search for a fieldwork experience prior to meeting with OSOT;

- **Location** – in what city/town are you interested in working? How far can you travel?
- **Structure of placement** – Are there limits to the number of hours you can commit per week? What length placement are you seeking? Do you wish to complete all required hours in one setting?
- **Timing** – When can you commence fieldwork? What timeframe do you have to complete the required number of hours?
- **Focus of Practice** – Are there particular areas of practice that you are most interested in? Consider the relevance of your previous experience to a potential fieldwork site. See OSOT's membership data profile for descriptors of OT practice foci in Ontario.
- **Learning style** – How do you learn best? What resources would you require of your fieldwork supervisor and their facility?
- **Learning needs** – What do you see to be your primary learning needs? What are your strengths? What other sources of support and learning will you seek to support you while you're undertaking a clinical placement?

6. Finding an Organization to support your Re-entry placement

Securing a placement requires some tenacity and salesmanship. Here are a few suggestions and considerations:

- Understand that OTs, particularly in urban settings, often have commitments to provide fieldwork placements for occupational therapy students. There are OT programs in Toronto, Hamilton, London, Kingston and Ottawa so these cities are particularly impacted by student placement demands. Be sensitive to this as you approach organizations. You may wish to be flexible in the timing of your placement so as not to coincide with a heavy student placement commitment. Additionally, this is a reason to underline that you are an *experienced OT* and that you bring a wealth of clinical skills and professional skills to this placement. Your needs are different than those of a student OT and you have a lot to offer in return for a therapist's supervision.
- Get to know the organizations in your community that offer the programs that would complement your experience. It is easier to sell yourself when you can bring expertise to the caseload that you might be handling. To find out where services are located, visit hospital or community organization websites.
 - i. For a listing of hospitals across Ontario see the Ontario Hospital Association website, www.oha.com. You'll find a Hospital locator on their homepage. This will help you access individual hospital websites and you can search for their programs and services, contact information for occupational therapy, etc.
 - ii. To source the names of therapy provider agencies that have contracts to provide community based OT services for your local CCAC [click here](#) to find a list of service providers by CCAC.
 - iii. Sometimes a private practitioner may be able to provide an unpaid placement. For a listing of OSOT members who are in private practice in your area, contact [OSOT](#). To facilitate this search please identify the focus of practice you're interested in.

When looking up organizations on their website, note the following:

- What is the key focus of the facility – what kinds of programs and services do they offer – you will want to know as much about this as possible before you make contact so that if you are able to connect with an OT you will sound informed and can position your skills in relation to the services the OTs likely provide.

- Explore the site for reference to occupational therapy. Ideally, look for a Practice Leader or contact person.
- Look up the facility's contact information. If you can find contact information for OT that's terrific but if not, jot the general telephone number and then call and ask who the contact is for OT services.
- Look to see if they are advertising for an OT position. While you're not eligible to apply, this may tell you that the organization is going through some transition with new staffing...your experience and extra hands may be a resource during this period (just information to tuck into your marketing files!)
- Note the organization's web address and email for future reference

7. **Insurance Issues**

You may find that organizations are reluctant to consider unpaid placements because they are concerned about insurance and liability issues. OSOT has worked to minimize these concerns in the following ways.

- **Professional Liability Insurance**
Supervising therapists may be concerned that they will be responsible for any errors or omissions you make in client care. This is true because ultimately the registered OT is responsible for the OT care that their clients receive whether they deliver them themselves or through a student, a support worker or a re-entry candidate. That said, a registered occupational therapist's professional liability insurance plan should cover for any errors or omissions in this regard. In fact, OSOT has made special provisions in our professional liability insurance policy to ensure that there is an extension of coverage for professional liability to any supervised re-entry candidates for any supervising OT that carries their insurance through OSOT. This should be reassuring to both the OT and their administration. Ask OSOT for a memo clarifying this position which you can pass along to organizations that you are negotiating with.
- **Accident Insurance**
Often public organizations are reluctant to accept unpaid placements because they fear the repercussions in the case of an unpaid worker being hurt on the job (e.g. transferring a patient, slipping on a wet floor, etc.). Paid employees are covered by the organizations WSIB coverage but this does not extend to unpaid workers. In the event that you were hurt on the job they fear you might take legal action against them for damages. To counter this concern, OSOT has secured an Accident Replacement Insurance that re-entry candidates can purchase on a weekly basis that provides reasonably priced coverage

protection in the event of an accident. This is acceptable to most employers. Contact [OSOT](#) to secure further information about this policy if you need it.

8. Making the Contact

- Make your first contact in person (ie over the phone) if possible. In this way you can respond to the reaction you receive, answer immediate questions that might otherwise defer someone from getting back to you, etc. It's easy when you're busy to just put a request aside, but if you're talking to someone on the phone you get a sense of them as a person, hear how flexible you are, etc.
- Before you call, jot down what you want to say. Identify...
 - a. Why you are calling...what you are needing to do and why.
 - b. Tell them a little bit about you....where you trained, worked, what you've been doing and what you're interested in doing now.
 - c. What you would like to ask the OTs/facility to consider – be clear about what your request is. Indicate up front how flexible you can be in meeting the requirements of the placement hours (e.g. can you work full-time or part-time).
 - d. Clarify that you would be asking someone to supervise you as an unpaid re-entry candidate. Reassure them that the College of Occupational Therapists has some resource materials for supervisors and make sure you have those in a format that you could offer to send or email to a therapist who might be willing to consider your request. You can also refer them to the College if they prefer to discuss it with COTO first.
 - e. You may also wish to indicate that you have been in touch with OSOT, and are seeking resources to assist you to be your own best networker and self directed learner and are monitoring information on the OSOT website to be current with issues affecting OT in Ontario.
 - f. Be prepared with information about professional liability....indicate that you are aware from both the College and OSOT that the supervising OT retains responsibility for all client care and that his/her professional liability insurance would cover them. (Both OSOT and CAOT have clarified with their insurers that protection extends to entry/re-entry candidates who are supervised by registered occupational therapists). Also be prepared to share that you are aware that some facilities have issues related to accident insurance and WSIB and that you would be willing to sign a waiver and have

already found a means through which you could access general accident insurance (WSIB replacement insurance) that has been acceptable to hospitals across the province (this is the policy available on a weekly basis through OSOT).

- Make some calls to facilities you are willing to consider....ask if they have an OT Practice Leader (this would likely be the best person to talk to) or ask to speak to an occupational therapist. The problem with going to an HR department is that they aren't necessarily knowledgeable about what you need to do. That said, however, the one thing that might be an advantage to connecting with HR is that if they have an OT recruitment challenge.... You might want to position your request as something that might ultimately lead to a solution...something that could help, etc.
- When you get to an OT....introduce yourself, your situation, your request. Be prepared as above to respond to their queries and concerns. Ask them if you can send some more information about you, re-entry placements, etc. and if they agree that's when you get the resume, the COTO documentation and a cover letter that is tailored to the facility and the kinds of services they provide and promotes your skills related to these...off to them as soon as possible. The fastest way would be to forward in a professional email with the letter and documentation in attachments. Remember you'll need to access their email address (this will be a subtle reminder to them that you are current with current technology, email, electronic documentation, etc.)
- If you run into reluctance or a negative response, consider the following:
 - a. Ask whether it is a function of timing – maybe another time of year would be better (e.g. perhaps staff are on holiday or OT student placements are commitments at this time) – indicate how flexible you can be
 - b. Make sure you understand what the problem or reasons for refusal are....you can learn from this....and maybe you can address their concerns in a follow-up letter.
 - c. Consider asking if they would mind if you came for a visit – acknowledge that they can't provide a placement but indicate that you would benefit from a chance to view an OT service, just visit for a tour or observation experience. If they agree, this

at least allows you to present yourself and follow-up You never know, it might make a difference.

- d. Even if the answer is no.....you might ask if they would know of any other facilities or OTs that might consider a contact
- e. Regardless of the outcome follow-up with a written “thank you for considering my request” note....either posted or by email is fine but this is a lovely professional courtesy that you never know when it might come back to you

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