

Code of Ethics

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Introductory Statement

The ethos of the occupational therapy profession and its practice requires its members to discharge their duties and responsibilities, at all times, in a manner which professionally, ethically, and morally compromises no individual with whom they have professional contact, irrespective of that person's position, situation or condition in society.

The Code of Ethics is founded on the bio-ethical principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, honesty, veracity, confidentiality, justice, respect and autonomy.

The following statements, which constitute a Code of Ethics, are intended to act as clear guidance to all occupational therapists in pursuance of their professional practice. These statements do not replace the principles and procedures adopted by employing bodies, relevant legislation nor do they deny other rights within society not specifically mentioned.

The code is set out with a 'Statement' which is an essential component of the code, accompanied in most instances by an '*Interpretation*' which is designed to amplify the relevant statement.

About Occupational Therapy Australia

Occupational Therapy Australia is the professional association for occupational therapists in Australia.

Our members are qualified occupational therapists employed throughout the public and private sectors. They provide health care, vocational rehabilitation, and consultancy to clients.

Our mission is to provide member benefits through access to local professional support and resources, and through opportunities to contribute to, and shape, professional excellence.

For more information about Occupational Therapy Australia, visit www.otaus.com.au.

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Relationships with, and Responsibilities to, Patients and Clients

Confidentiality

Beyond the necessary sharing of information with professional colleagues, occupational therapists are to safeguard confidential information relating to patients and clients.

- a. *The disclosure of confidential information is permissible when:
 - i. *there is a legal compulsion*
 - ii. *a patient/client gives informed consent.**
- b. *Refer to relevant legislation relating to access of information e.g. Freedom of Information legislation.*

Personal Relationships

Occupational therapists shall not enter into personal relationships which damage the establishment and maintenance of professional trust.

Occupational therapists might experience strong positive or negative feelings towards patients and clients which may be detrimental to the therapeutic relationship. When necessary, consideration should be given to a change of therapist.

Respecting Patients' and Clients' Rights

Occupational therapists have a responsibility always to promote the dignity, privacy, autonomy, and safety of all people with whom they come in contact in their professional practice. They should adhere to local procedures.

Occupational therapists have a responsibility to inform all patients and clients of financial costs of any goods and services. Costs need to be fair and reasonable, reflecting the services provided.

- a. *Occupational therapists are to ensure that they also observe the provisions of the current health and other relevant acts pertaining to the area of work.*
- b. *Protecting privacy may extend to safeguards when publishing visual or written material. It is necessary at this time to refer to local procedures.*
- c. *Autonomy implies that patients and clients and carers are active participants in any decision regarding their involvement in services.*

Withdrawal of Services for Patients and Clients

While occupational therapists have a right to state and support their views about the service for which they work, they shall avoid any action which places patients and clients at risk, even if this is during the course of an industrial dispute.

- a. *No action shall be taken which affects patients and clients whose ultimate safety might be at risk. This would include services which, if withdrawn, could cause severe hardship.*
- b. *When further guidance is required consult Occupational Therapy Australia or the relevant union(s).*
- c. *It is recognised that there are times when therapeutic services should be withdrawn.*

Professional Integrity

Advertising

Occupational therapists may advertise in connection with their professional practice if the advertising is not false, not misleading or deceptive or likely to mislead or deceive, is not vulgar or sensational, does not claim or imply superiority of the occupational therapist over any or all other occupational therapists, does not contain testimonials or endorsements concerning the occupational therapist. The advertisement for the occupational therapist may contain a statement of the areas of expertise in practice.

Discrimination

Occupational therapists shall not discriminate in their professional practice, on the basis of ethnicity, culture, impairment, language, age, gender, sexual preference, religion, political beliefs or status in society.

Personal Abuse of Alcohol or Other Drugs

Occupational therapists should not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs which adversely affect the performance of their professional duties.

Professional Relationships and Responsibilities

Loyalty

Occupational therapists shall be loyal to their professional organisation and their fellow members of the profession and shall respect and uphold their dignity.

Loyalty within any profession shall not override one's responsibility as a member of society to uphold its moral and legal obligations. If an occupational therapist is in doubt about the behaviour of a colleague, the person can appeal in confidence to the National Office of Occupational Therapy Australia or the specific state or territory Member Association. Occupational therapists should support their professional organisations at all levels.

Public Comment

Occupational therapists are to ensure, when publishing articles or comments, that it is clear whether they are representing the profession or whether they are making personal comment.

Working Relationships

Occupational therapists shall respect the needs, traditions, practices, special competencies, and responsibilities of their own and other professions, as well as those of the institutions and agencies that constitute their working environment.

Professional Relationships and Responsibilities

(cont'd)

Professional Development

All members of the occupational therapist profession have an individual responsibility to maintain their own level of professional competence and each of them must strive to improve and update knowledge and skills.

Occupational therapists as members of the profession shall promote and maintain practice based on current knowledge and research, and develop this body of knowledge as appropriate.

They shall promote the understanding of occupational therapy to the general public.

Occupational therapists have a responsibility to contribute to the continuing development of the profession by critical evaluation of professional practice, research, student education, continuing education and membership of the professional association.

Research

Occupational therapists undertaking research will seek ethical approval from relevant bodies prior to commencement.

Any research undertaken has ethical requirements with which the occupational therapist must comply.

Professional Standards

Competence

Occupational therapists must acknowledge the boundaries of their competence. They shall provide services and use interventions for which they are qualified by training and experience.

- a. *Occupational therapists who delegate services must be satisfied that the people to whom these are delegated are competent in their execution. Occupational therapists in these circumstances retain ultimate responsibility for the management of their patients and clients.*
- b. *Occupational therapists shall refrain from undertaking any activity in which problems or conflicts of a personal nature are likely to affect their competence or cause harm to patients, clients or colleagues.*
- c. *Occupational therapists should recognise that a number of professions share common skills and thus boundaries of practice may overlap.*

Referral of Patients and Clients

Occupational therapists shall respond to referrals in a timely manner.

Occupational therapists have the right to refer patients and clients on to a more appropriate service or decline the referral as appropriate.

Keeping Records of Patients and Clients

Occupational therapists shall keep records and reports clearly and concisely for the information of patients and clients, professional colleagues, legal purposes and to record occupational therapy services.

- a. *Clear and concise records assist in the provision of optimum quality and service delivery.*
- b. *Provision must be made for the secure and confidential storage and disposal of such records.*
- c. *Refer to the relevant legislation on access to personal information.*



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