



## OT CANADA Backgrounder on Use of Title in Retirement

### Introduction

For the last few years, efforts have been underway by the profession to better understand the *use of title* as it applies to occupational therapists in the sunset stages of their careers. This has led to a larger conversation about the impact of retirement on occupational therapists.

### The Working Group structure

The purpose of the Group as described in its Terms of Reference states:

The Working Group will explore issues and options relating to the continued use of title after retiring from the occupational therapy profession and prepare a report with recommendations for Occupational Therapy Canada.

The Group includes representatives from the Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy Regulatory Organizations (ACOTRO), the Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy Academic Programs (ACOTUP), Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT), the Canadian Occupational Therapy Foundation (COTF) and retired individuals.

The Working Group has a formal connection, through CAOT, to the CAOT Fellows, for whom this is a very important issue.

The Group reports to ACOTRO, ACOTUP, CAOT and COTF on an annual basis.

### The Use of Title in Retirement Working Group

Members of the Group are meeting to explore this phenomenon and consider solutions that support the ongoing contribution to the profession of retired occupational therapists, provide clarity and protection to the public, and work for the mutual benefit of the profession as a whole.

This topic is an offshoot of the work addressed by another OTC initiative on use of title: the Joint Position Statement on Professional Identity, Personal Identify and Public Accountability prepared in 2013 by ACOTRO, ACOTUP, CAOT, COTF and the Professional Alliance of Canada<sup>1</sup>. See [http://acotro-acore.org/sites/default/files/uploads/position\\_statement\\_on\\_professional\\_identity\\_individual\\_responsibility\\_and\\_public\\_accountability\\_through\\_the\\_use\\_of\\_title.pdf](http://acotro-acore.org/sites/default/files/uploads/position_statement_on_professional_identity_individual_responsibility_and_public_accountability_through_the_use_of_title.pdf)

(The joint position statement can also be found on the CAOT website at [http://www.caot.ca/pdfs/positionstate/PS\\_ProfessionalID.pdf](http://www.caot.ca/pdfs/positionstate/PS_ProfessionalID.pdf))

<sup>1</sup> The Professional Alliance of Canada is now known as the Alliance of Canadian Occupational Therapy Professional Associations or ACOTPA.

This 2013 document highlights the understanding that the practice of occupational therapy, as a health and wellness profession, takes place in many environments such as in healthcare, workplaces, the school system, the military, in social services, in corrections, and in many other locales where individuals, groups, communities strive to maximize their capacity. Further, it acknowledges that practitioners of occupational therapy include those who provide professional education, are involved in research, and act in administrative and managerial roles. Most professional legislation now explicitly acknowledges these roles as the practice of the profession.

### **Issues**

When an occupational therapist retires from a job, it does not necessarily mean that she/he is retiring from practice. Many individuals want to continue to contribute to the profession, or to their communities, for pay or as a volunteer. It may be unclear when that work triggers the need for ongoing regulatory registration. Is the “retired occupational therapist” indeed practising as an occupational therapist? Is there a difference between registration requirements for the “retired occupational therapist” who is doing certain non-direct client activities at the end of career and the same practice of a younger occupational therapist doing the same thing mid-career? And if a person is indeed practising, how does one navigate the currency and continuing competence requirements of their regulatory body, and what about those registration fees?

Furthermore, how does a retired (non-registered) occupational therapist who wishes to communicate his / her background and experience to others do this in such a way that does not violate regulatory rules but also allows for communication of information about a full and rich professional life?

### **What are we talking about when we refer to “Use of Title”?**

The ability to use title is a privilege granted to members of a regulatory college who have demonstrated they possess the required education qualifications, knowledge, skills and attributes to practise their profession.

In all Canadian provinces, occupational therapists are required to register with a regulatory college to:

- use the title of occupational therapist, OT, or O.T.;
- hold him/herself out to be/ represent him/herself as an occupational therapist; and
- work as an occupational therapist.

In accordance with legislation and regulations, only registered occupational therapists are permitted to use titles such as occupational therapist or abbreviations such as OT, or equivalent terms in other languages, or state they are providing occupational therapy services.

## What did we learn?

From its initial work the Working Group learned that:

- there is confusion in many circles over what is meant by *use of title*;
- retired occupational therapists want to be able to proudly convey that they are an occupational therapist;
- there is concern over a potential loss of identity;
- retired occupational therapists very much want to remain connected with the occupational therapy community
- retired occupational therapists believe they have much to offer their communities, society, etc.
- retirement from a job and retirement from practice are not always distinguishable
- the ongoing requirements of regulatory registration can be problematic for occupational therapists who have left a job but wish to remain engaged in practice; if retired occupational therapists remain registered, they can find meeting the obligations of registration fees, continuing competence, and currency hours a challenge;
- there is confusion as to why members of other professions are able to continue to use the title of their profession while occupational therapists do not have this option;
- it is difficult to determine what constitutes “practice” that requires registration. In addition, many retired occupational therapists do not know what opportunities may come their way.

## What do retired occupational therapists want to be able to do?

From our preliminary exploration, the Working Group found that, in retirement, those who have been providing direct services to clients seldom continue this work in any form after leaving that position – in essence there is a greater likelihood that these occupational therapists are retiring from the practice as well as from their positions. Those involved in practice areas such as research, education or management are less likely to fully retire from practice when leaving their primary employment.

Retired occupational therapists, regardless of preretirement employment, may be called upon to share knowledge with service groups, the general public, other professionals, students, etc. through presentations, articles, chapters in books, etc. Is it sufficient for the retired occupational therapist to inform the “audience” that he/she is no longer registered but is retired from practice? Is *transparency* of current registration status enough or is the *accountability* that comes with professional regulatory registration also needed?

What do we mean by transparency? In many cases it is adequate for the retired individual to clearly communicate that she/he was educated and worked as an occupational therapist but does not currently provide services as an occupational therapist.

In some practice areas, however, it is essential that the recipient of the service is entitled to assurances that the occupational therapist is registered with the provincial regulator. This relationship with the

regulatory organization provides the service recipient confirmation that the occupational therapist is involved in programs that address ongoing competence, meets ongoing registration requirements, and may be subject to professional review if there are matters of concern.

### **Where could we go from here?**

Here is a list of some of the key areas that the working group identified as areas for potential focus:

- Clear statements from regulators related to use of title in retirement when no longer registered.
- Guidance from regulators to determine when registration is necessary.
- Explicit information from all occupational therapy organizations regarding the manner in which non-registered / retired occupational therapists are able to participate in their organizations.

### **How do OT Regulators address the Use of Title in Retirement?**

For information on how a regulatory organization addresses *use of title* in retirement, individuals are urged to review their provincial regulator's website or connect with that organization.

### **Summary**

Use of one's professional title is of importance to individuals and organizations alike within the occupational therapy profession. Robust dialogue amongst and within organizations has started. The working group acknowledges the CAOT Fellows and many other occupational therapists have highlighted this as an important issue for the profession.