

Pennsylvania State Board of Occupational Therapy Education and Licensure Newsletter

October 2009

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Optometry Referrals

By Daniel Panchik DSc, OTR/L

On May 18, 2004, the licensure law governing occupational therapy practice was amended to allow occupational therapists to accept referrals from optometrists. Here is a reflection from one practitioner in the commonwealth on how things are going.

Elizabeth Rohrer, OTR/L and a senior therapist at Lancaster General Hospital, commented that there are many advantages and new opportunities emerging for occupational therapists (OTs) and doctors of optometry (ODs). "OTs and ODs make a good team, because both professions focus on their patients in a functional and holistic basis," she said.

Rohrer noted that both are trained in the medical and behavioral models and work across the lifespan. She stressed the importance of being proactive in establishing relationships with ODs. "Don't wait for referrals to come to your department. Call ODs in your area, establish a relationship, provide in-services and let them know what you can offer their patients. Once the connection is established, the options for OTs and ODs are endless."

Liz listed several important services OTs offer ODs, including: driving safety assessments for the elderly; functional visual perceptual intervention to assist with a person's return to driving and work tasks after neurological incidents; low-vision intervention, including home safety assessments and adaptations; pediatric treatment including sensory integration, gross/fine motor skills and visual motor interventions. OTs also provide functional visual field compensatory strategies for people with visual field cuts or neglect.

Similarly, ODs are able to provide OTs with several important services, some of which include: visual acuity and prescription updates after a neurological injury; visual field testing; prisms to assist with double vision and eye-teaming deficits; perform visual rehabilitation for neurological and pediatric patients with visual motor deficits related to their diagnosis; and visual health assessments when indicated.

Many advantages and opportunities are emerging for OTs and ODs since the amended licensure law that now

allows occupational therapists to accept referral. Practitioners stress the importance of being proactive and taking the initiative to develop these important referrals and professional relationships.

Seeking Opinions from the Board

The State Board of Occupational Therapy Education and Licensure receives many inquiries from licensees regarding the practice of occupational therapy. When seeking advice from the board, it is important to keep in mind that under state law, as interpreted by commonwealth courts, the board is *not* authorized to issue advisory opinions.

An advisory opinion is a writing issued by a body such as a state professional licensing board, outside the context of any litigation, that speaks to whether a proposed action by a licensee is or is not permissible under the board's authorizing act or regulations.

Writings that are in the nature of advisory opinions are legally null and void, *Avis Rent A Car Systems, Inc. v. State Board of Vehicle Mftrs.*, 548 A.2d 402 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1988). In *Morrison v. State Board of Medicine*, 618 A.2d 1098, 1100 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1992), the court reiterated that a "Board would be acting outside the scope of the power granted to it . . . if it provided pre-approval."

The board office is always happy to answer your general questions whenever possible; however, the board is not permitted to "speak" through advisory opinions, and therefore often cannot provide the desired response to a fact-specific situation.

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