



*ASSOCIATION  
DES ERGOTHÉRAPEUTES  
DU N.-B.*

*N.B. ASSOCIATION  
OF OCCUPATIONAL  
THERAPISTS*

**New Brunswick Association of Occupational Therapists  
(NBAOT)  
Position Statement on the Use of Physical Modalities within  
Occupational Therapy Practice**

**August 2008**

**Position**

The New Brunswick Association of Occupational Therapists supports the use of physical modalities by qualified occupational therapists. A qualified occupational therapist is a person who can demonstrate evidence of possessing the theoretical background and technical skills for safe and competent use of the specific modality within his/her occupational therapy practice. The New Brunswick Association of Occupational Therapists advocates the use of physical modalities within occupational therapy practice as an adjunct or in preparation for purposeful activity to enhance a client's occupational performance. The use of physical modalities in occupational therapy practice may be implemented to facilitate, maintain or improve occupational performance in the areas of productivity, self-care and leisure.

**Background**

Physical modalities are defined as those treatments that produce a response in soft tissue through the use of light, water, temperature, sound, and/or electricity. Physical modalities may include but are not limited to hot packs, cold packs, paraffin wax baths, fluidotherapy, ultrasound, whirlpool, contrast baths, and electrical stimulation units (i.e. transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS), neuromuscular electrical stimulation).

The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists defines occupational therapy as a health profession that is concerned with promoting health and well being through occupation. Occupation is defined as all of the activities that a person does in the course of his/her daily life. "The primary goal of occupational therapy is to enable people to participate in the occupations which give meaning and purpose to their lives."<sup>1</sup> Occupational Therapists have a broad education that enables them to work with people of all ages and abilities. Specific knowledge of human anatomy, physiology,

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, Definition of OT, accessed 07/23/2008 from [www.caot.ca](http://www.caot.ca).

medical/surgical conditions and pathology provides sufficient background for additional continuing education in the use of physical modalities post-entry level of practice.

Occupational therapists are concerned with a client's occupational performance (i.e. productivity, self-care and leisure) and as such, the use of a physical modality would be considered an adjunct to other therapeutic interventions. The overall goal of occupational therapy would be to enhance a person's occupational performance. The use of physical modalities in isolation of occupation is not considered within the domain of occupational therapy practice.

### **Responsibilities of the Occupational Therapist**

Occupational therapists may acquire the theoretical knowledge and technical skills for safe and competent use of various physical modalities either through professional continuing education opportunities, or through on the job training. Either type of training should provide the theoretical background as well as the safe technical use of the physical modality. As with any treatment technique, occupational therapists must be able to demonstrate competent use of the physical modality within his/her practice regardless of the method of training.

Occupational therapists who use physical modalities in their practice will maintain competency in the use of the respective physical modality. Ongoing competency will be maintained through continuing education courses, ongoing clinical practice and/or self development with respect to the physical modality or modalities.

The occupational therapist using a physical modality shall explain the benefits and risks of the physical modality to the client prior to its use in treatment. The occupational therapist will obtain the client's informed consent for the use of the physical modality. The occupational therapist will adhere to the necessary universal precautions and standardized infection control practices.

## References

Alberta College of Occupational Therapists, *Use of Acupuncture and Related Therapies within Occupational Therapy Practice April 2007*, accessed 07/18/2008 from [www.acot.ca](http://www.acot.ca)

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, *Definition of OT*, accessed 07/23/2008 from [www.caot.ca](http://www.caot.ca)

McGuire, Mary Jo, American Occupational Therapy Association, *Physical Agent Modalities: A Position Paper*, American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 1992, 46, p1090-91.