

# Managing Productivity Requirements as a Level II Fieldwork Student

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**I**n 2008, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) completed a Moral Distress Survey regarding current occupational therapy practitioner's level of stress relating to productivity requirements in the workplace. This survey discovered that 61% of the 106 respondents felt "excessive pressure to meet productivity standards" (AOTA, 2016). The Moral Distress Survey was conducted again in 2015; this time the pool of respondents grew to 1,900 practitioners, and 83.73% stated they also felt the same pressure to meet unrealistic productivity requirements (AOTA, 2016). Based on these results, it is safe to say that productivity standards set by payers is not only a common occurrence, but it is also an escalating and troubling concern affect-

ing occupational therapy practitioners throughout the country.

As a master's of science in Occupational Therapy student at the University of New England, I was given the opportunity to practice and observe as a Level II fieldwork student in a skilled nursing facility (SNF), where productivity requirements average between 85% and 95% for an 8-hour day. To put this into perspective, a therapist who works an 8-hour or 480-minute day would need to actively bill for 432 minutes in order to have a productivity rate of 90%. How is this possible with the endless documentation requirements, lunch breaks, staff and care meetings, and the mandatory breaks enforced by the state governments?

Although I have not had the opportunity to independently work under these strict productivity standards yet, I have personally seen the impact they have on a client's care and a practitioner's state-of-mind during therapeutic sessions. With ever-changing documentation requirements, practitioners are unable to complete billable documentation unless they are in the presence of the client when considering Medicare regulations. This can negatively affect the therapeutic session, as the focus is no longer on enhancing the client's occupational performance to achieve stated goals, but more so on sending updates to insurance companies. This may lead to decreased therapeutic outcomes and serious ethical concerns to be posed by all involved.

As the debate over productivity requirements remains in the forefront of the occupational therapy and third-party payer realm, it is important to prepare future occupational therapy students for the reality that is productivity. Prior to entering my first Level II Fieldwork rotation, I was already intimidated by what I had heard from professors and past supervisors alike about expectations. This intimidation soon





# 5 Tips: Productivity Management

## 1 Don't panic.

If you are feeling worried about meeting high productivity expectations, take a deep breath. It is the experience of both myself and my peers that many facilities will work with you to establish a reasonable productivity level. They know you are just learning!

## 2 Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Your supervisor and other staff members are there to help you in any way possible, and from my experience, are always willing to discuss anything that may advance your knowledge on this challenging journey.

## 3 Be flexible.

The saying, "Expect the unexpected" completely applies to working in a SNF. A client is going to have a sudden unexpected appointment, a medical emergency, or be working with another professional when you are scheduled to see them. Roll with the punches and do your best!

## 4 Ask questions.

More than likely, your supervisor and/or other rehabilitative staff will be there to answer any questions you may have at any point. It is easy for a student to not speak up regarding these questionable situations for several reasons, including the perceived power differential between supervisor and supervisee, fear of failing fieldwork, or simply just not wanting to have an uncomfortable conversation with a colleague. However, if something seems unethical or pushing the limit, do not hesitate to ask your supervisor about it.

## 5 Trust your gut.

You are a student who has received the required education in order to be on this fieldwork rotation. You know the precautions, protocols, and information about the most common diagnoses to get you through this still breathing. Use your clinical judgment and reasoning in order to abide by ethical principles set by AOTA in the *Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics* (2015). However, if something still does not feel right, do not be afraid to contact your academic advisor or fieldwork coordinator from your university to discuss future actions and decisions.

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turned to stress and panic, which only put a damper on my attitude regarding working in a SNF. I found that I was so worried about getting from one client to the next and completing my documentation while in the session that I was not providing the client-centered, holistic care I had been exposed to during my schooling.

But soon after reaching my frustration limit with productivity, I began returning to my roots. The way in which I approached intervention completely changed. For instance, instead of consistently worrying about getting every last minute with Client A, I turned my focus toward what Client A needed as a human being and someone who required the services I was providing. In other words, I began taking a more humanistic approach to treatment rather than viewing my practice as a limited transaction between consumer and provider. After initiating

this change in my thought process, I noticed that I was providing client-centered, evidence-based care to people of all ages and abilities, and I realized how much I enjoyed working in a SNF despite the lofty time management expectations. Of course, one cannot simply ignore productivity requirements or needed resource utilization group minutes. Therefore, the view of these expectations never fully disappeared from my line of sight; I was just viewing them in a different light and not allowing them to dictate my occupation-based practice.

This small change completely altered the way I practiced for the remainder of my time at this SNF. I am proud and excited knowing that on graduation in May I would like to work in a similar setting as well as continue to advocate for the occupational therapy profession to lower productivity requirements in support of client-centered care.

It is my belief that future occupational therapy students may share some of the same worries and hesitations I initially felt concerning productivity and time management requirements. Therefore, I would like to share five tips that I found helpful to assist the up-and-coming fieldwork student who may feel pressure to perform at standards that are difficult to meet within a 40-hour workweek (see above).

## References

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