

June 5, 2020

Elinor Larney
Registrar
College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario
10 Bay Street
Toronto, ON

Delivered by email

Dear Elinor,

On behalf of the membership of the Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists I am writing to identify concerns relating to the upcoming College registration period which we would ask be brought to the attention of the College Council.

The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly created challenges across the health system and for all health professionals. We are proud of Ontario occupational therapists who have weathered the past three months with resilience. Many are working extended hours in situations with great risk, others are working hard to transition to virtual service delivery models, others have experienced reductions or cessation of referrals or clients and are coping with the resulting fiscal challenges. While professional lives have been disrupted, there has also been an impact in therapists personal and family lives. Parents have lost access to daycare and are coping with children at home, families are coping with the challenge of remotely supporting senior parents or vulnerable family members, partners may be out of work, anxiety about the pandemic may be prevalent, the stresses of altered work patterns are coming to bear...the list goes on. These have been challenging times for Ontarians and occupational therapists.

In a recent OSOT survey of members, 60% of all respondents identified that they have experienced a loss of income since emergency measures were put in place. 26% of all respondents reported a significant loss of income. Analysis of this data reflects the expected; that those members working as independent contractors or private practitioners or business owners experienced most significant impacts as reflected in the following data:

Sector	% Moderate Loss of Income	% Significant Loss of Income
Auto Insurance Sector	20%	48%
Private Practice	15%	45%
Home & Community	14%	27%
Combined of above	16%	40%

While this reflects a concerning loss of occupational therapists' earnings over the pandemic period *to date*, this does not include impacts that families may experience as a result of spouse/partner loss of income. Nor does it reflect the ongoing challenges of the slow re-opening of health services in the province and the ongoing impact this will have on member's finances. 30% of our private practice and independent contractor respondents identified significant concern about restoring their client base and capacity to increase earnings quickly upon re-opening of services. 20% of all survey respondents are concerned and uncertain about childcare for their children, potentially resulting in limitations to work.

We share these comments as context for a request on behalf of members for consideration of strategies to mitigate the upcoming hardship that many will experience with the College's \$743 annual fee (\$657.55 +\$85.48 (HST)) due between now and August 31, 2020.

With COTO's registration deadline extension, dues payable for many practising Ontario OTs will include: COTO (\$743), OSOT (\$223.) and/or CAOT (\$285.) and professional liability insurance (approx. \$70.) all within a 1-month period. We have already heard, and anticipate further membership concern, about the fiscal implications of this compounding of fees. For our part, the OSOT Board of Directors considered the fiscal implications of our own OSOT registration fee which is due by October 1, 2020, and has agreed to implement a one time 20% reduction in membership fees for fiscal 2020-21. Additionally, we will offer a staggered payment option. This is in full understanding that this may result in loss of income and therefore some projects and programs may need to be delayed.

Our goal is to ensure that Ontario occupational therapists don't experience additional hardship to that already experienced. To this end, on behalf of our members, we ask the College to consider making a similar adjustment to the College fees to help mitigate further financial hardship for registrants.

Like the Society, COTO's financial resources are publicly reported and it will be clear to members that there is reserve fund that can be accessed in extenuating circumstances.

We propose that the pandemic has presented such extenuating circumstances and therefore requires deliberate and reflective analysis of options to enable occupational therapists to continue to meet their professional obligations without undue financial hardship, including their ongoing obligations to maintain currency of practice, professional development, etc. We are aware that some provincial colleges have reduced fees this year or are considering this option.

The following suggestions are presented as examples of suggestions for your consideration:

- A one-time annual registration fee reduction for all registrants
- An option to pay the annual registration fee in installments
- A one-time annual registration fee reduction for members who make specific application. The College may/may not determine to engage specific eligibility criteria.

The Society's Board of Directors hopes that the Council will see the importance of providing relief for occupational therapists during this unprecedented period. We look forward to hearing of your deliberations and decisions.

Sincerely,



Martha Bauer, OT Reg. (Ont.)
President



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