

# COLLEGE OF PHYSICAL THERAPISTS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

## PRACTICE STANDARD

### Number 3

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## ASSIGNMENT OF TASK TO A PHYSICAL THERAPIST SUPPORT WORKER

### Definitions

**Assignment of Task:** Transfer of a component of a physical therapy treatment plan to a physical therapist support worker. For the purpose of this Practice Standard the term ‘assignment of task’ should be considered synonymous with ‘transfer of function’ or ‘delegation’ to a support worker.

**Physical Therapist Support Worker (PTSW):** An individual who works under the direction and supervision of a physical therapist. An individual who does not work under the direction and supervision of a physical therapist is not considered a PTSW.

**Supervision:** The means by which the physical therapist monitors the performance of the PTSW to ensure the provision of competent care. Supervision may occur directly (where the physical therapist is physically present) or indirectly (where the physical therapist is not physically present).

**Consultation:** The process of providing expert advice, education and/or training, or facilitating problem-solving regarding a specific issue with another service provider, on a time limited basis, that does not transfer responsibility. The consulting physical therapist does not have responsibility for supervising the ongoing services of the provider<sup>1</sup>.

### Purpose

Where a physical therapist determines that assigning a portion of the ongoing physical therapy treatment plan to a PTSW is appropriate for a patient, and that care will not be compromised by an assignment, an assignment of task may occur in accordance with the requirements set out in this Practice Standard. Physical therapists must demonstrate accountability for the assigning process, including the decision to assign as well as the monitoring and supervision of the PTSW to whom the task is assigned.<sup>2</sup>

When assessing a patient in a consulting or advisory capacity, the physical therapist may determine that ongoing physical therapy is not warranted; in which case an assignment of task is not required. The consulting physical therapist may make patient specific recommendations based on their assessment, which do not require ongoing physiotherapy supervision. See above definition of ‘consultation’.

## **Accountability**

The physical therapist assigning a component of the physical therapy treatment plan has the responsibility to determine and demonstrate appropriate assignment, supervision, and documentation.<sup>2</sup> This includes ensuring that the PTSW is aware of patient confidentiality and standard infection control measures.

The physical therapist is accountable for the physical therapy task(s) he/she assigns to the PTSW. Assigned tasks must be within the physical therapy scope of practice and the physical therapist's level of competence.

## **Critical Thinking**

The decision to assign a task to a PTSW is made by the physical therapist, on a case by case basis, and requires clinical judgment. When deciding whether or not to assign a task to a PTSW, consideration must be given to: whether or not the assignment is in the interest of the patient, the competence of the PTSW, and the level of risk involved. See Appendix A – Decision Making Tool.

## **Ensuring Competence**

Once the physical therapist has made the decision to assign a task to a PTSW, the physical therapist must ensure the competence of the PTSW.

## **Steps in Assigning a Task**

The physical therapist demonstrates adherence to the Practice Standard by:

- Explaining to each patient the relationship between the physical therapist and the PTSW to clarify the difference in roles and responsibilities as they relate to patient assessment and treatment.
- Obtaining informed consent from each patient, or substitute decision maker, for the involvement of a PTSW in the delivery of their physical therapy treatment plan. The PTSW must be made aware that patient consent can be revoked at any time.
- Teaching the assigned task to the PTSW.
- Ensuring that the PTSW is competent to carry out the assigned task(s).
- Instructing the PTSW to recognize any adverse treatment reactions, cease treatment and immediately report to the appropriate person as indicated in the supervision plan.
- Establishing and documenting an appropriate supervision and communication plan.
- Being available for consultation. In the event of planned or unplanned absences, the physical therapist must have an appropriate supervision and communication plan in place, or arrange for transfer of supervision to another physical therapist.
- Reassessing the patient and assigned task at timely intervals.
- Making any changes to the treatment plan, including terminating the assigned task appropriately.

## **Tasks That are Not Assigned to Physical Therapist Support Workers**

Physical therapists must not assign any physical therapy task which has an evaluation component that immediately influences the treatment program. A physical therapist must not assign the following tasks to PTSW:

- Interpretation of referrals;

- Initial assessment and reassessment;
- Interpretation of assessment findings, diagnosis, and/or prognosis;
- Discussion of physical therapy diagnosis or treatment rationale with anyone other than the physical therapist;
- Planning, selecting, or initiating physical therapy treatment programs;
- Tasks requiring a physical therapist's clinical judgment, or where continuous clinical judgment is necessary to monitor and guide patient care;
- Modification of treatment beyond established limits;
- Completion of documentation that is the physical therapist's responsibility;
- Teaching of the assigned task to another person;
- Referral of a client to other professionals or agencies; and
- Discharge planning.

### **Supervision**

The physical therapist will provide appropriate supervision to the PTSW for assigned tasks to ensure the appropriate quantity and quality of care that will achieve physical therapy treatment goals. Supervision includes ongoing monitoring of support personnel competence.<sup>2</sup>

A clearly documented supervision plan must be in place to ensure the safety and effectiveness of the assigned tasks. It is the assigning physical therapist's responsibility to determine and implement an appropriate method of direct and/or indirect supervision on a case by case basis. The method and frequency of supervision provided by the physical therapist is dependent on assessing risk by considering: the practice setting, the complexity of the patient needs, the nature of the assigned task, and the physical environment. The PTSW supervision plan must anticipate, and include strategies for, planned and unplanned absences. Where a different physical therapist will be covering a caseload during a planned or unplanned absence, the covering physical therapist assumes accountability for any direct supervision he/she provides to the PTSW and any changes he/she makes to the assigned task.

### **Documentation**

The physical therapist must document the assigned task(s) in the patient's clinical record accordance with Practice Standard No. 1 Clinical Records.

Documentation must include:

- details of the assigned tasks;
- identity of the support worker who is to perform the assigned tasks;
- supervision plan and process; and
- any changes made, or progression of, the assigned tasks.

### **Billing**

Physical therapists that bill on a fee-for-service basis must ensure that receipts are transparent and make clear to the payer who is providing physical therapy treatment on a given day. Where a physical therapy treatment session is provided exclusively by a PTSW the receipt must indicate this. The physical therapist must only submit accurate and factual accounts.

## APPENDIX A

# DECISION MAKING TOOL

Based on my physical therapy assessment, what are the risks in assigning a task?

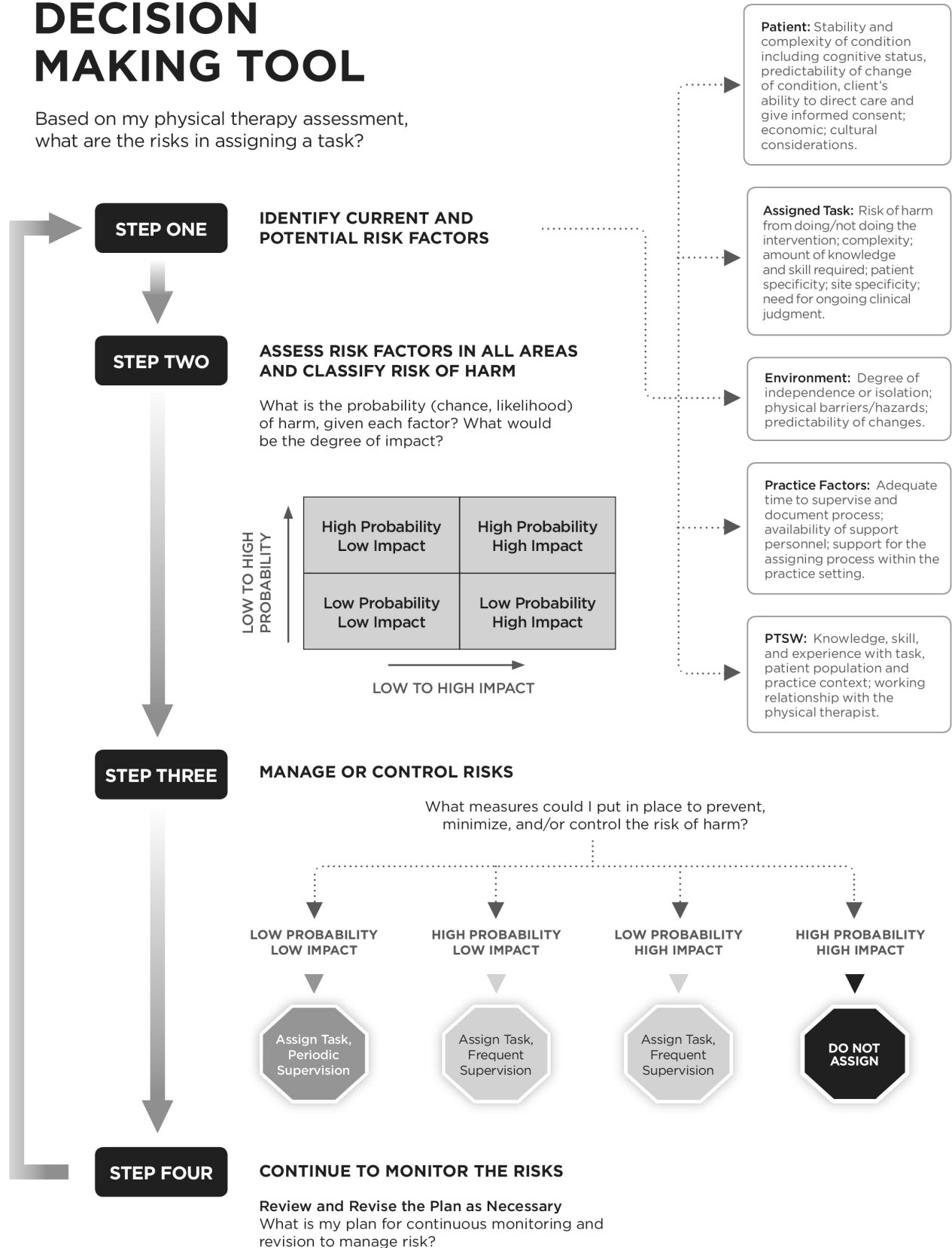


Diagram adapted from "Supervising Support Personnel" by the College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia (COTBC), 2011, p. 8. Copyright 2011 by COTBC

## References:

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists. Practice profile for support personnel in occupational therapy. Appendix B: Guidelines for the supervision of assigned occupational therapy service components. 2009 [cited 2012 Mar 8]; Available from: URL: [http://www.caot.ca/pdfs/SupportPer\\_Profile.pdf](http://www.caot.ca/pdfs/SupportPer_Profile.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> College of Occupational Therapists of BC. Practice guideline. Supervising support personnel. [Online]. 2011 [cited 2012 Mar 8]; Available from: URL: [http://www.cotbc.org/PDFs/COTBC\\_Practice-Guideline\\_Supervision2011.aspx](http://www.cotbc.org/PDFs/COTBC_Practice-Guideline_Supervision2011.aspx)

## Additional Resources:

*Competency Profile Essential Competencies of Physiotherapist Support Workers in Canada.* Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators and Canadian Physiotherapy Association, July 2002.

National Guidelines for Support Workers in Physiotherapy Practice in Canada, Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators, 2000.

Physiotherapy Alberta College and Association. Supervision resource guide for physical therapists. 2008. Available from URL: [http://www.physiotherapyalberta.ca/files/supervision\\_web.pdf](http://www.physiotherapyalberta.ca/files/supervision_web.pdf)

College of Physiotherapists of Ontario. Physiotherapists working with physiotherapist support personnel. Guide to the standards for professional practice. Available from URL: [http://www.collegept.org/Physiotherapists/College%20Documents/Registrants%20Guide/RegistrantsGuide\\_en](http://www.collegept.org/Physiotherapists/College%20Documents/Registrants%20Guide/RegistrantsGuide_en)