

Our ref: OTBA 2012/026
Your ref: Letter dated 10 August 2012

11 September 2012

Ms Rebecca Thompson
President
WA Occupational Therapy Association
4a/266 Hay Street
Subiaco WA 6008

Dear Rebecca,

Further to our initial response noting that your letter had been received by AHPRA on 15 August 2012, I am pleased to provide a more detailed reply to address the association's query regarding the use of ultrasound and electrical modalities.

Occupational therapists are registered under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law). The National Law limits the use of certain titles (see www.ahpra.gov.au/Legislation-and-Publications.aspx for a copy of the legislation). The protected title of Occupational Therapy is occupational therapist.

If a person does not hold registration and uses any of the protected titles they risk being in breach of the National Law and the Board may take action. For example, any person who wishes to practice acupuncture and use the protected title (i.e. call themselves an acupuncturist) must be registered with the Chinese Medicine Board of Australia. Section 113 of the National Law specifies the restriction on use of protected titles.

Other than title and practice protections (relating to restricted dental acts, prescription of optical appliances and manipulation of the cervical spine to the relevant professions) the National Law does not specify the activities that require registration as an occupational therapist.

To provide guidance on activities the National Boards have defined "practice" in their registration standards as:

Practice means any role, whether remunerated or not, in which the individual uses their skills and knowledge as a health practitioner in their profession. For the purposes of this registration standard, practice is not restricted to the provision of direct clinical care. It also includes using professional knowledge in a direct non-clinical relationship with clients, working in management, administration, education, research, advisory, regulatory or policy development roles, and any other roles that impact on safe, effective delivery of services in the profession.

The definition is intended to be broad and inclusive. It allows individuals with qualifications as a health practitioner to be registered if they are using their skills and knowledge as a health practitioner.

The Board recognises that the use of ultrasound and electrical modalities is not routinely taught in pre-registration occupational therapy training programs (i.e. bachelor degrees or masters entry programs of study). Some practitioners may have undertaken training in these techniques and

developed knowledge and skills which mean they can utilise these techniques to augment other occupational therapy approaches and interventions, as relevant to their specific professional practice. Accordingly, while not part of basic occupational therapy training these techniques may be used by some appropriately trained practitioners.

Registration therefore as an occupational therapist under the National Law does not preclude the use of ultrasound and electrical modalities. However in accordance with the Board's Code of Conduct (see www.occupationaltherapyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines.aspx) a registered practitioner would be expected to:

- ensure they are appropriately trained and competent for any practice undertaken;
- ensure the technique is applied in a way that reflects the standard of care that would be provided for a reasonably competent practitioner (eg consideration of indications, contra-indications, precautions, informed consent, infection control procedures etc);
- ensure that they have in place professional indemnity insurance which is sufficient for the risks and potential claims that could arise from this practice. This would normally involve checking that the practitioner is covered for the use of ultrasound and electrical modalities and have this endorsed or acknowledged in their insurance document.

A registered practitioner would also be expected to abide by the Board's Continuing Professional Development (CPD) registration standard which sets out the requirements practitioners need to maintain and improve competence in practice, thus ensuring the safety and quality of services provided to the public. CPD is an important component in ensuring the delivery of occupational therapy in a safe and competent manner by occupational therapists. The Board has recently published a Fact Sheet at its website which provides further guidance on CPD. Practitioners will be required to sign a declaration of compliance with the CPD registration standard when renewing their registration each year (see www.occupationaltherapyboard.gov.au/Registration-Standards.aspx).

Rebecca, I trust this information has provided the necessary guidance the association is seeking and recommend that practitioners keep updated via the Board's website to gain clarification on matters relating to the National Law and the work of the National Boards (see www.occupationaltherapy.gov.au).

Yours sincerely,



Dr Mary Russell
Chair
Occupational Therapy Board of Australia