

## Section 3: About rehab professionals

### ABOUT REHAB PROFESSIONALS

Rehabilitative care is provided by health professionals, who as a result of their training, have developed a specialized skill set to help individuals recover from physical, cognitive (thinking/memory) or communication (speaking/language and hearing) problems caused by an injury or illness. Rehab professionals can also play a role in the prevention of functional decline and helping individuals age safely at home.

Rehab professionals work independently as sole practitioners or as part of an interprofessional team with other rehab and health practitioners (e.g., nurse practitioners, geriatricians and other medical specialists) to develop and implement a coordinated and holistic plan of treatment for individuals. Rehab professionals may be assisted by rehab therapist assistants in supporting the delivery of rehab services. A rehab therapist assistant (e.g., occupational therapist assistant, physiotherapy assistant) can only work under the direction and supervision of the rehab professional. This is because the rehab professional is regulated and has the expertise to conduct assessments and develop treatment plans specific to the needs of individuals. Rehab therapist assistants help with the carrying out of treatment by assisting with particular tasks assigned and monitored by the rehab professional.<sup>1, 2</sup>

Rehab professionals include audiologists, dietitians, kinesiologists, occupational therapists, physiatrists, physiotherapists, psychologists, rehabilitation nurses, social workers and speech-language pathologists, as well as other regulated health professionals.

**Audiologists** are trained health professionals with knowledge and expertise in the prevention, identification, assessment, treatment and (re)habilitation of auditory and balance disorders; they provide care to all age groups. Untreated or improperly managed auditory dysfunction can have a profound impact at any age and can result in compromised speech, language, cognitive and social development in toddlers, poor academic performance in children, and isolation and depression in adults; inappropriate hearing aid amplification is very dangerous and can further damage residual hearing. Audiologists provide the following services:

- o Provide comprehensive evaluation of auditory function
- o Prescribe, fit and prescribe assistive hearing devices including hearing aids, sensory aids, alerting systems and captioning devices to maximize use of residual hearing, ensure safety and minimize impact of hearing impairments

- o Provide counselling and aural (re)habilitative services (e.g., auditory skill development, speech reading, etc.) to maximize communicative function and benefits of amplification
- o Evaluate and provide interventions for tinnitus and vestibular function

Source: [The Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists](#)

**Dietitians** are experts in the science of nutrition to enhance lives and improve health across health care settings and in the community. For example:

- o In hospitals, dietitians assess and plan nutrition care for patients who need special diets, including those with kidney disease, tube feeds, cancer and digestion issues.
- o In doctor's offices, they provide counselling in areas such as cholesterol, diabetes, feeding young children, weight management and allergies.
- o In long-term care homes and other facilities, they direct resident care and manage food systems, staff and budgets to provide safe and nutritious meals.

Source: [Dietitians of Canada](#)

**Kinesiologists** use human movement to treat and/or prevent musculoskeletal injuries or chronic conditions in order to improve physical performance, function, health and overall wellness. Kinesiologists assist with the prevention and management of chronic conditions through the use of education, physical activity, exercise-based strategies and behaviour change modifications. They also engage in behaviour change techniques, counselling theories and strategies through exercise-based strategies that improve and foster positive mental health. Intake assessments are used alongside motivational interviewing to understand a client's physical and/or mental wellness. This allows the kinesiologist to create an individualized care plan that will assist the patient/client in reaching their health and wellness goals. Clinical kinesiology services include the following:

- o Musculoskeletal assessment
- o Postural evaluation and education
- o Rehabilitative and functional re-training exercise
- o Fitness conditioning for weight loss, cardiovascular training, and muscular development
- o Diabetes management strategies
- o Cardiac rehabilitation
- o Cancer rehabilitation

- o Stroke rehabilitation
- o Mental health management
- o Corporate wellness program design and implementation
- o Hydrotherapy

Source: [Ontario Kinesiology Association](#)

**Occupational Therapists**, often called OTs, work with individuals of all ages whose ability to engage in daily activities have been hampered. This may be as a result of injury, illness, chronic disease, mental health issues, developmental delays, learning problems, aging or other health conditions. OTs, as regulated health professionals, work with their clients in a variety of settings (e.g., home, work, hospitals, clinics and schools) to:

- o Promote health and well-being for people of all ages and across the spectrum of care
- o Create solutions that help people do what they want, when and where they want
- o Promote participation in productive and meaningful activities in daily life
- o Enhance an individual's quality of life, and
- o Empower individuals, allowing them to live life to its fullest

Source: [Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists](#)  
[Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists](#)

**Physiotherapists** are skilled health professionals who assess, diagnose within scope, and analyze the impact of injury, disease, disorders, or lifestyle on movement and function. Physiotherapy is a health profession that promotes physical activity and overall health; prevents and rehabilitates disease, injury, and disability; and manages and improves acute and chronic conditions, activity limitations, participation restrictions and physical performance through intervention and education. Physiotherapists are trained to use diagnostics and assessment procedures and tools to develop and implement preventive and therapeutic courses of intervention to promote optimal mobility, physical activity and overall health and wellness. Physiotherapists work with people in one-on-one or group-based settings. They provide treatment in all health care settings in Ontario including hospitals, long-term care facilities, home care, community-based clinics, schools, private practice clinics and primary care networks. Working with patients, physiotherapists promote independence and prevent injuries and disability, addressing conditions such as:

- o Heart and lung disease related sequelae
- o Musculoskeletal injuries (sprains, strains, fractures)
- o Stroke, brain injury, spinal cord injury

- o Cancer related sequelae
- o Incontinence and pelvic dysfunction
- o Chronic pain and chronic conditions (e.g., diabetes, arthritis, osteoporosis)
- o Pre-operative preparation and post-surgery recovery

Source: [Ontario Physiotherapy Association](#)  
[Canadian Physiotherapy Association](#)

**Physiatrists** are physicians who specialize in physical medicine and rehabilitation, dealing with the evaluation and treatment of patients whose functional abilities have been impaired. The disabilities and impairments may result from injuries or diseases such as:

- o Stroke
- o Neuromuscular disorders
- o Musculoskeletal disorders
- o Cardiopulmonary diseases
- o Arthritis
- o Peripheral vascular disease
- o Cerebral palsy

The physiatrist can help to improve a person's functional capabilities through medical treatment and by organizing and integrating a program of rehabilitation therapy such as physical, occupational, speech or psychological therapies, or social nursing, prosthetic, orthotic, engineering and vocational services.

Source: The Association of Academic Physiatrists cited in  
[Canadian Association of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation](#)

**Psychologists** specialize in understanding and treating normal and abnormal mental states, as well as perceptual, cognitive, emotional, and social processes and behaviour. They study how thoughts, attitudes, emotions and relationships inform our mental states and behaviour. They also study how different regions of the brain affect behaviour, thoughts, emotions, perceptions, social interactions and cognition (thinking skills). They do this by engaging in research, implementing research into assessment techniques (i.e., standardized testing) and into treatment techniques (i.e., psychotherapy techniques) as well as teaching. They work with individuals, groups, families as well as in larger organizations such as hospitals, schools, correctional institutions and other related

government institutions as well as in industry. Psychologists work on improving mental and cognitive health. Some of their research and practice areas include but are not limited to:

- o psychological factors and problems associated with physical conditions and disease (e.g. diabetes, heart disease, stroke)
- o psychological factors and management of terminal illnesses
- o cognitive functions such as learning, memory, problem solving, intellectual ability and performance
- o the perception and management of pain
- o mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, phobias
- o neurological, genetic, psychological and social determinants of behaviour
- o brain injury, degenerative brain diseases
- o developmental and behavioural abilities and problems across the lifespan
- o addictions and substance use and abuse (e.g. smoking, alcohol)
- o stress, anger and other aspects of lifestyle management

Source: [Ontario Psychological Association](#)

**Rehabilitation nursing** is focused on patients and families. It acknowledges and witnesses the patient/family experience, enables patients and families to adapt to illness and injury and uses therapeutic communication and integration of therapeutic skills in activities of daily living as a way to make a difference to rehabilitation outcomes. All nurses in rehabilitation must have specialized knowledge and skills, specific to the patient population being served.

Source: Personal Communication - Irene Simpson,  
President, [Ontario Association of Rehabilitation Nurses](#)

**Social workers** help people get the most out of their relationships, work and community life. They help with identifying the source of stress or problems, strengthening coping skills and finding effective solutions for issues such as:

- o Adjusting to life crises
- o Pressures related to being a caregiver
- o Managing stress, anxiety and depression
- o Grief and loss
- o Helping people connect to resources and find where to get help
- o Relationship issues
- o Addictions

Social workers provide a variety of services including but not limited to: individual, family and couple assessment and counselling; psychotherapy; vocational assessments/rehabilitation; stress management; counselling for eating disorders; and grief, loss and trauma counselling.

Source: [Ontario Association of Social Workers](#)

**Speech-language pathologists** are professionals with specialized knowledge, skills and clinical training in assessment and management of communication and swallowing disorders. Speech, language and associated cognitive disorders can adversely affect academic performance, workforce integration, and social interaction. Individuals with untreated swallowing disorders can find themselves at risk of dehydration, malnutrition, and pulmonary compromise. Areas assessed and managed by speech-language pathologists include the following:

- o Language disorders to improve ability to understand spoken and written language, convey ideas verbally and in writing, and communicate in social situations
- o Cognitive communication disorders to improve the reasoning, problem solving, memory and organization skills required to communicate effectively
- o Speech disorders to improve articulation (pronunciation) and to help those who stutter improve their fluency
- o Swallowing disorders to ensure that patients/clients are on safe diets and not at increased risk for choking or food/liquid build-up in the lungs

Source: [The Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists](#)

The Ontario Ministry of Health provides [additional information](#) on other regulated health providers. To learn more about the individual scopes of practice and controlled acts available to each profession, see the [Regulated Health Professionals Act](#) and the [Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998](#).

### REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> College of Physiotherapists of Ontario. (2016). [Working with physiotherapist assistants standard](#).

<sup>2</sup> College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario. (2018). [Standards for the supervision of occupational therapist assistants](#).