

PRACTICE

The Re-positioning of Psychology in Ontario – Advocacy and the Ontario Psychological Association

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It's fitting to be included in this inaugural edition of the *Journal of Clinical Psychology Practice*. The practice of professional psychology in Ontario has dramatically changed in the last 20 years. The shift from institutional to community settings now represents the majority of psychologists in clinical practice. But has this improved public access?

There is a health care access crisis in Ontario at a time when:

- One out of five persons in Ontario are coping with mental health problems, half of whom remain undiagnosed and untreated,
- Chronic disease, though often preventable or manageable, remains a leading cause of disability and/or death, and
- Demographic studies predict increasing numbers of seniors with cognitive and mental health issues.

The Chief Executive Officers of the Local Health

Integrated Networks have identified mental health and addiction services, as well as access to primary care, chronic disease prevention and management, and services to seniors as the most pressing issues needing to be addressed. The short-lived tenure of Mr. David Caplan as Minister of Health for the province of Ontario also identified mental health as a priority for the Ministry. The players and the landscape are changing – are we as psychologists prepared to change?

As psychologists we are constantly poised to influence change. That is our training. In our professional humility we may have overlooked the need to assertively represent the unique and important role we play. The Ontario Psychological Association continually seeks opportunities to represent our professional attributes and broadcast them publicly.

On November 21, 2007, the Ontario Psychological Association participated in a strategic planning day facilitated by lawyers from the government relations branch of Fasken Martineau.

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The objective of the session was to generate a set of strategic goals (both long and short term) that would serve as the basis of a new political advocacy campaign. Those goals – to include, extend, monitor, seize, and enhance – are presented in Table 1. It was also felt that key unifying messages were needed to help brand psychology. Eight key messages were adopted and are listed in Table 2.

In advocating how psychologists can be effective in addressing Ontario’s health care needs it was also necessary to present solutions rather than add to the confusion. This is our platform:

The Psychology Solution

Mental Health and Addictions

Individuals with mental health problems have the highest utilization rate of all health services (mental and physical) and comprise 50-70% of the patient population in primary care settings. In primary care settings psychologists use their advanced knowledge of mental health, mental illness, and addictions to provide direct patient service and to complement and enhance the services of other health providers.

In secondary, tertiary, and community settings, psychologists effectively apply their expertise in the application of behavioural disease and addiction management tools such as personality and behavioural health screens for treatment selection, client education and motivation, treatment adherence strategies, and behavioural change outcomes.

Chronic Disease Prevention and Management

According to Ontario’s Chronic Disease Prevention and Management Framework, over 80% of people in Ontario over the age of 45 have a chronic disease. Of these people, about 20% suffer from more than two or more chronic conditions with the overall economic burden of chronic disease estimated at 55% of all direct and indirect health costs.

In the area of chronic disease prevention and management, psychologists are well trained in issues related to motivation and the human change process and the promotion of optimum physical, intellectual,

Table 1. Strategic Goals

<i>Include</i>	psychologists in Primary Health Care Reform (e.g., Family Health Teams),
<i>Extend</i>	the protected title of psychotherapist to psychologists,
<i>Monitor</i>	potential for amendments to the <i>Public Hospitals Act</i> , to allow for hospital privileges for psychologists (as well as the <i>Mental Health Act</i>),
<i>Seize</i>	opportunities to offer services to government (e.g., education; demonstration projects), and
<i>Enhance</i>	inter-professional collaboration and scope of practice (e.g., prescriptive authority).

emotional, social, and interpersonal functioning.

Psychologists have the expertise and advanced clinical training to assess, diagnose and treat the psychological, emotional, and behavioural impact of chronic health conditions. With this expertise in behavioural disease management, psychologists assist patients to obtain the necessary knowledge, and develop the goals and strategies to maximize the benefits of both psychological treatment and the services of other health providers.

Services for Seniors

Cognitive, mental health and addiction problems are highly prevalent in Ontario’s rapidly growing aging population. According to the Canadian Coalition for Seniors Mental Health (CCSMH), one million seniors suffer from a wide array of mental illnesses (mood, anxiety, and psychotic disorders), emotional, behavioural and cognitive difficulties and a variety of brain diseases such as Alzheimer’s disease, strokes, and Parkinson’s disease.

In the area of geriatrics, psychologists perform mental and behavioural health assessments, including personality, intellectual, emotional, cognitive, social and interpersonal functioning, neuropsychological and disability evaluation, and mental capacity

Table 2. Key Messages

Psychologists	all of whom hold the title “doctor”, are highly trained mental health professionals who provide quality care that is cost-effective and rooted in scientific research.
Psychologists	are vital in the assessment and resolution of problems that interfere with day-to-day life, such as physical and mental illness.
Psychologists	not only assess and treat mental illness, but are a vital resource for increasing emotional and psychological well-being through enhancing one’s effectiveness and quality of life.
Psychologists	have been trained to apply conceptual and ethical skills to the broadest variety of human concerns. Psychological services are essential throughout our lifespan.
Psychologists	are one of only two professions in Ontario who can legally diagnose a mental disorder.
Psychologists	have the greatest depth and extent of education and training in assessment and therapy techniques as compared to other health professionals. A psychologist has a doctoral degree of psychology, which involves more than ten years of post-secondary study and supervised training.
Psychologists	provide people with the skills they need to prevent, reduce, or delay relapse following treatment leading to significant cost savings to the individual and the health care system.
Psychologists	offer both experience and expertise. The essence of professional psychological practice is its adherence to the scientific stance.

screening. Psychologists then develop effective clinical interventions based on such assessment results to determine the functional strengths of a senior and identify areas of needed support to

enhance effectiveness and quality of life.

ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES TO DATE

Goal 1: Extension of Psychotherapist Title

Early in the advocacy process, we received a commitment from the Minister of Health to consider a proposal from the Ontario Psychological Association for resolution of the problem acceptable to the Ministry and to other professions affected by the restriction of the title. The Ontario Psychological Association Board adopted the College of Psychologists of Ontario’s proposal for the creation of an exemption under the Psychotherapy Act from the restriction on title. We received support from other professional associations and colleges for the exemption proposal. The exemption proposal was presented to the Assistant Deputy Minister in October 2008 and was successfully amended in the spring of 2009.

Goal 2: Primary Care

The Ontario Psychological Association is monitoring the status of Family Health Teams with respect to integration of psychology. The Association is collecting data on the number and location of Family Health Teams which include psychologists. We prepare for the roll out of additional Family Health Teams and have been encouraged by our membership to advocate for psychology’s inclusion on the Teams.

Goal 3: Public Hospitals Act

The Ontario Psychological Association has highlighted the importance and need for amendments to the *Public Hospitals Act* at the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council consultation meetings on enhancing inter-professional collaboration and in our written submission to the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council’s discussion paper.

Goal 4: Offering Services to Government

The Ontario Psychological Association has

successfully implemented the 20 million dollar Student Assessment Project in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Education. The success of this project will be used as a demonstration model of the Association's desire and ability to effectively undertake other government partnership initiatives.

Goal 5: Inter-Professional Collaboration

The Student Assessment Project has served as a demonstration of effective inter-professional collaboration through the Ontario Psychological Association's inclusion of other professions in the implementation of the initiative (i.e., speech and language, occupational therapy). The Association remains an active member of the Coalition of Regulated Health Professional Associations. The Association has played a leadership role in the organization and on-going activities of the inter-professional coalition on Auto Insurance.

We have also lobbied the assistant deputy minister responsible for Health Force Ontario for the inclusion of psychology in Ministry forums related to inter-professional collaboration and education.

Goal 6: Scope of Practice

The Ontario Psychological Association has successfully organized a forum on prescriptive authority for psychologists. Invited participants included representatives from the American

Psychology Association, Canadian Psychology Association, Canadian Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology, College of Psychologists in Ontario, Ontario Ministry of Health, Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council, Council of Provincial Associations of Psychology, and other relevant stakeholders.

The Association has begun the process of introducing the idea of a review of psychology's scope of practice with the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council and directly with the Ontario Ministry of Health. We anticipate being a participant on the Minister's new Advisory Committee on Mental Health.

A Final Word

Can psychology optimize its utility and inherent value for the benefit of our province?

Absolutely.

Can we improve public access to professional services by psychologists?

We must.

Will we need to continually re-position ourselves in order to advocate for our profession?

This is guaranteed.