The Multiple Mentoring Model of Student Supervision
A Fit for Contemporary Practice

“With health care advances and changing work patterns, more practicing occupational therapy practitioners are working within specialty areas and working part time. Traditional one-to-one supervision models do not work well within these practice perimeters, leading to decreased availability of Level II fieldwork placements for a growing number of occupational therapy academic programs. The multiple mentoring supervision model offers a solution to not only increase the pool of potential fieldwork educators, but also to give novice fieldwork educators the opportunity to learn from those with more experience, and to give fieldwork students the opportunity to experience specialty practice areas.

What is the multiple mentorship supervision model and what are the benefits?
Multiple mentoring is not new to occupational therapy practice; it was first described by Nolinske in 1986 in an article in the American Journal of Occupational Therapy. It is characterized by a team of two or more fieldwork educators supervising a single student or a team of two or more students. Supporting the concept that fieldwork education is the responsibility of all occupational therapy practitioners, the model provides the opportunity to shift the responsibility for fieldwork supervision from one designated occupational therapy practitioner to any occupational therapy practitioner within an area facility who has knowledge and experience that can benefit students. Besides reducing the time spent by each individual fieldwork educator in directly supervising students, the model opens up the opportunity to supervise students for occupational therapy practitioners who work in part-time positions or in facilities with newly developing occupational therapy programs. Less experienced practitioners sharing the supervision of a student may also increase their confidence and comfort with student supervision, as reported by Copley and Nelson (2012) in the American Journal of Occupational Therapy.

The multiple mentoring model can expose students to multiple areas of practice as well as multiple practitioners. Because fieldwork educators who are sharing supervision responsibilities may have a different practice focus or come from different workplace environments, they learn from one another even as the student learns from them. For example, the Queensland Occupational Therapy Fieldwork Collaborative found that a shared supervision model can serve to facilitate the clinical reasoning skills of fieldwork educators, who develop common expectations for student performance by explaining to one another what they do. Students are able to draw on the expertise of a variety of practitioners, and they have reported this to be helpful in cultivating and developing their own unique approach to therapy. Having exposure to a variety of supervision styles also helps the student identify his or her own preferred learning style.

Fieldwork sites using shared supervision models are able to offer more student placements and therefore have increased opportunity for staff recruitment due to the increased number of students who have direct experience at the site. Shared supervision may also create a more positive experience for the fieldwork educator. There is less likelihood of communica-
Strategies for Success in Using the Multiple Mentorship Supervision Model

- Orient students to facility resources and fieldwork educator teaching styles.
- Communicate fieldwork educator schedules and preferred communication structures.
- Set overall learning objectives and graded expectations for performance.
- Hold weekly group supervision meeting with all supervisors present or at least providing shared documentation.
- Identify clinical reasoning differences prior to supervision implementation.
- Establish structures to support regular communication between fieldwork educators and students.
- Develop forms to track student caseload and progress.
- Use learning contracts to track student ownership of fieldwork assignment.

tors as diversity of clientele, assessment procedures, intervention opportunities, and documentation requirements. This information is essential to developing site-specific learning objectives that correspond to the AOTA Fieldwork Performance Evaluation and to developing a schedule of expectations over the length of the fieldwork. A written manual that orient students to the resources and policies of the facility, therapy expertise, teaching philosophy, and scheduling preferences of each fieldwork educator as well as the site-specific learning objectives and weekly schedule will help the student to situate him- or herself in the learning experience. Diligent and regular communication among educators regarding their observations and evaluation of student performance throughout the placement is critical to success, according to the Queensland Occupational Therapy Fieldwork Collaborative. Tracking forms and secure electronic communication venues can be helpful for fieldwork educators reviewing and discussing student work and grading expectations. Such systems can also help students and fieldwork educators communicate with another, particularly because they may not share physical space every day.

Supervisors who openly discuss and identify clinical reasoning differences prior to student placement will find it easier to reconcile divergent expectations once a student arrives. Although individual meetings are helpful, a supervision meeting at least once a week with all supervisors present will help to ensure that expectations are clear and information is not lost. If this is not possible, other communication structures in which all supervisors contribute to identifying student strengths and weaknesses is helpful. For example, students posting questions or assignments in a shared electronic workspace, such as Google Documents, in advance of supervision meetings can help keep all supervisors apprised and ready to contribute to feedback and appropriate remediation of identified problem areas. Student learning contracts are another way for students to identify areas of concern and potential resources to address problem areas in advance of supervision meetings. Because the scheduling needs of each supervisor will vary, it is essential that a student be sensitive to supervisor schedule needs and be flexible in how he or she accesses time for each educator.

The multiple mentoring model, although it does require some upfront work, is a practical strategy for student supervision that fits the contemporary occupational therapy practice environment and provides students with new opportunities to develop and refine their practice and communication skills. ■

Resources

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