

December 15, 2011

Jacqueline Tiley, Executive Director
American Hippotherapy Association

Dear Ms. Tiley:

The American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc. (AOTA) recognizes the use of the movement of the horse (hippotherapy) as one of many interventions that may be used by occupational therapy practitioners, as long as it is based on an appropriate occupational therapy evaluation, and integrated into a broader occupational therapy program and plan of care with the overall goal of supporting engagement in daily activities and occupational performance. Documentation should be explicit in linking the occupational therapy intervention to the client goals and outcomes.

Selection of an appropriate intervention is dependent on the medical diagnosis (e.g. neurological, muscular, psychosocial) and the specific client's performance goals (e.g. improvement in mobility, balance, or sensory responses), for occupational therapy (OT). Therapeutic horseback riding in which the goal is to achieve the skill of riding would not be considered occupational therapy. For example, an occupational therapy goal might be to work on dynamic balance, a skill involved in the performance of various daily activities e.g. completing morning dressing, playing on playground, etc.

In addition, from both an ethical and reimbursement perspective, it is incumbent upon the occupational therapist to provide documentation which objectively supports the rationale for this choice of intervention, how and why it is appropriate to meet the specific goals and needs of the client.

As per the Code and Ethics Standards of the profession, the occupational therapy practitioner using this approach must be competent to provide this intervention, which will likely require receipt of special training to work in this area.

Sincerely,



Maureen Freda Peterson, MS, OT/L, FAOTA
Chief Professional Affairs Officer