



AOTA The American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.

Occupational Therapy:
Living Life To Its Fullest®

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



4720 Montgomery Lane
Bethesda, MD 20814-1220

301-652-2682
301-652-7711 fax

800-377-8555 TDD
www.aota.org



Barbara Heine, PT, HPCS
President, American Hippotherapy Association
5001 Woodside Road
Woodside, CA 94062

Dear Ms. Heine:

The American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc. (AOTA) recognizes the use of the movement of the horse (hippotherapy) as an intervention tool as long as it is based on an appropriate occupational therapy evaluation, treatment plan, and goals and assists in achieving the appropriate functional outcome.

It is appropriate for occupational therapy services using the movement of the horse (hippotherapy) as a treatment tool to be billed as neuromuscular reeducation, therapeutic activities, therapeutic exercise, or sensory integrative activities provided that all payer requirements have been met and depending upon the treatment goals and the way hippotherapy is used during the treatment session. Therapeutic horseback riding in which the goal is to achieve the skill of riding would not be considered occupational therapy.

The occupational therapy practitioner using the movement of the horse also should be specifically trained in the use of this tool.

Sincerely,

Deborah Lieberman, MHSA, OTR/L, FAOTA

Practice Department

V. Judith Thomas, MGA

Director

Reimbursement and Regulatory Policy