



## Quality of Life.Com: Web-Based Continuing Education for Occupational Therapists

**INVESTIGATORS:** Dr. Elizabeth Townsend  
Dr. Suzanne Le-May Sheffield  
Robin Stadnyk  
Dr. Brenda Beagan  
School of Occupational Therapy, Dalhousie University

“There is considerable potential to improve the quality of life of Nova Scotians who live with a mental health issue, a physical or intellectual disability, or old age if health services policy can offer more support for occupational therapists to make better use of web-based continuing education,” says Elizabeth Townsend. The Director of Dalhousie University’s School of Occupational Therapy, Dr. Townsend led a research team that assessed the degree of policy support for web-based continuing education.

Computers and web-based technologies have created incredible opportunities for continuing education and distance learning. There is immense potential for occupational therapists and other health professionals to benefit from these learning opportunities, especially in developing research skills and evidence-based practices. However, they face substantial barriers in using this technology.

The research team’s study, QualityOfLife.Com, revealed that both health services employers and health care professionals appreciate the importance of continuing education and the potential for using web-based technologies to access it; however, health professionals are unlikely to take advantage of these opportunities, particularly to develop research skills rather than the practical skills required to manage a caseload, unless there are workplace policies that support the initiative.

The researchers found that occupational therapists lack access to web-based technology, tend to lack the ability to use it and/or are apprehensive about using the technology when it is available – preferring to opt for face-to-face continuing education opportunities. In addition, there are no policies to deal with large caseloads and family responsibilities that limit time for professional development at work as well as time and access to equipment at home. While web-based technologies offer potentially greater access to continuing education without place and time restrictions, there are significant barriers. These include lack of access to computers, difficulty finding time at work, family obligations at home, lack of familiarity with web-based education, lack of confidence with technology, and a belief in the need for face-to-face contact for learning. Gender appears to be an important issue since many barriers are more likely to limit women’s use of web-based technology.

The study revealed a need for collaboration between various groups and agencies – including the Department of Health, Dalhousie University, professional bodies and unions – to inform health professionals of the opportunities and limits of web-based continuing education and to develop policies to support this new form of education.

-30-

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Dr. Elizabeth Townsend  
School of Occupational Therapy  
Dalhousie University  
Phone: (902) 494-8804  
Email: [Liz.Townsend@dal.ca](mailto:Liz.Townsend@dal.ca)



Research Results