

**CHIROPRACTIC & OSTEOPATHY BOARD  
OF  
SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

**Policy  
For Registered Chiropractors and Osteopaths**

**RE: Assistants in Chiropractic or Osteopathy Practice**

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# CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
1. Introduction .....	1
2. Definition .....	1
3. Role responsibilities .....	1
3.1 Role responsibilities of employer .....	1
3.2 Role responsibilities of the registered practitioner .....	1
3.3 Role responsibilities of assistant .....	2
4. Employment of chiropractic or osteopathy students as assistants .....	2
5. Training of assistants .....	2
6. Supervision of assistants.....	2
7. Reporting processes .....	3
8. Function of assistants .....	3
8.1 Tasks/treatment techniques which must not be delegated to assistants .....	3
8.2 Tasks/treatment techniques which may be delegated to assistants .....	4

## 1. Introduction

This document is the policy of the Chiropractic & Osteopathy Board of South Australia on the employment and use of assistants (or support staff) by registered chiropractors or osteopaths.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Board's Code of Professional Conduct & Practice.

This policy is the standard against which a registered chiropractor or osteopath will be evaluated in relation to the use of assistants in their practice.

For the purpose of this document, the term “assistant” will be used and “registered/ supervising/ treating practitioner” will mean a “chiropractor” or “osteopath” registered under the Act.

## 2. Definition

An assistant is a member of staff employed within a facility or private practice who assists the registered practitioner in the efficient delivery of their services to their patients.

The extent to which the assistant can be involved in treatment is defined in this document.

The supervising practitioner is required to comply with the requirements of the Board's Code of Professional Conduct & Practice.

***The registered practitioner is always directly accountable for the scope of practice of the assistant and the care the patient receives and vicariously liable for the conduct of the assistant.***

## 3. Role responsibilities

### 3.1 Role responsibilities of employer

The employer has an obligation to provide the environment to which the following role responsibilities can be fulfilled.

### 3.2 Role responsibilities of the registered practitioner

The registered practitioner has the responsibility to ensure that:

- The assistant is clearly and correctly identified as an assistant.
- The assistant understands the scope and limits of their responsibilities.
- The assistant is trained to be competent for the tasks required in that facility.
- The assistant is provided with clear direction as to the work to be undertaken.
- There are clearly defined lines of communication and delegation.
- The quality of the work of the assistant is regularly evaluated to ensure they are safe, effective, efficient and competent.
- At no time is an assistant to be requested or required to undertake a task which is outside their competence and cannot be delegated as defined in this policy.

### **3.3 Role responsibilities of the assistant**

The assistant must:

- Respect the rights and dignity of all individuals and be sensitive to their needs.
- Maintain confidentiality of patient information.
- Recognise the extent and limitations of their role responsibilities and only undertake activities that they are competent and delegated to perform.
- Maintain high standards of personal behaviour and conduct.
- Display professionalism toward other health providers.

## **4. Employment of chiropractic or osteopathy students as assistants**

Chiropractic or osteopathy students should not undertake employment where their developing knowledge as a student is being used to fulfil the requirements of a registered practitioner.

Registered practitioners who employ chiropractic or osteopathy students as assistants must adhere to this Policy of the Board.

## **5. Training of assistants**

Formal training for assistants should be encouraged to ensure an appropriate knowledge base and minimum standards of practice. Such training should include:

- Dealing with adverse reactions/outcomes
- Emergency procedures
- Confidentiality
- Basic chiropractic or osteopathy terminology
- Other recognised courses for assistants or equivalent study as determined by the registered practitioner/Board

Additional competence based training may be required to meet the specific requirements of a particular workplace. A training log and written procedures should be made available to the assistant where applicable.

A review of performance should be conducted annually.

## **6. Supervision of assistants**

The assistant is professionally responsible to and must work under the direction and supervision of a designated registered practitioner.

Supervision may be direct or indirect as identified by the registered practitioner and may depend on:

- Practice setting and type of service
- The nature of the task
- The acuity and/or stability of the patient's condition
- The complexity of the patient's needs
- The level of competence of the assistant

The lines of responsibility must be clearly defined both in terms of employment, in relation to the supervising practitioner and in keeping with roles as defined in the policy. The position description should include the procedure to be followed should the designated registered practitioner not be present. An assistant must have:

- a specifically designated chiropractic or osteopathy supervisor
- documented instructions from the supervising practitioner which are regularly reviewed
- ready access to the supervisor on the premises.

## 7. Reporting Processes

Where the assistant may be undertaking activities away from the direct supervision of the registered practitioner the job description should specify:

- the required methods, content and frequency of reporting
- the process for reporting emergency situations to the appropriate health care professional

## 8. Function of assistants

### 8.1 Tasks/treatment techniques which must not be delegated to assistants

The assistant **must not** under any circumstances:

- interpret referrals for chiropractic or osteopathy
- interpret diagnosis or prognosis
- interpret assessment findings
- undertake treatment procedures and goals of treatment
- conduct formal history taking with patients (must not conduct the complete history)
- undertake assessment procedures
- develop a physical diagnosis
- plan treatment programs
- institute or modify treatment programs
- offer advice with respect to conditions for the management of chiropractic/osteopathy complaints

The registered practitioner must apply the following procedures:

- Assess the client prior to each treatment.
- The site, timing, and spread of treatment must be clearly determined and set by the treating practitioner at the time of treatment.
- Undertake all warning and safety procedures, instruct the patient of contraindications and the expected reactions of the modality to be applied.
- Reassess the patient at intervals that are deemed appropriate for the condition being treated.

The registered practitioner bears full responsibility for the use and application of any treatment.

The following activities must not be delegated to an assistant or any other person who is not a registered practitioner or a student on supervised clinical practice, under any circumstances. Thus, an assistant must not apply:

- chiropractic or osteopathic examination
- electrotherapies
- motorised traction
- acupuncture (insertion or removal)
- orthopaedic examination
- neurological examination
- radiology/radiography

## 8.2 Tasks/treatment techniques which may be delegated to assistants

The assistant may undertake receptionist, clerical and housekeeping duties according to the requirements of the service subject to the processes and procedures specified by the registered practitioner. Such processes and procedures should be developed in accordance with acceptable standards of:

- patient safety
- quality assurance
- award conditions of employment
- occupational health, safety and welfare considerations

The assistant may supervise the safety of clients receiving these treatment techniques/modalities. The registered practitioner must provide specific instructions for the assistant to act in an emergency while summoning assistance. In the event of the occurrence of pain, discomfort or unexpected changes the matter must be reported to the treating practitioner immediately. The supervising practitioner must remain on-site during such treatments and be available to respond immediately.

The assistant may undertake non-treatment activities as required by the service, such as:

- escorting patients
- reception of patients
- preparing patients for chiropractic or osteopathy and aiding dressing following treatment
- preparing and maintaining equipment required for treatment

The assistant may also assist the registered practitioner:

- to lift/move patients
- with group activities
- with certain techniques, eg. cranials etc.
- in generating and maintaining medical records
- with patient assessment, such as collection of demographic data

Under the **specific instruction** of a registered practitioner the assistant may:

- supervise the practice of established exercise programs
- apply/remove weighted and/or mechanical traction provided that:
  - the assistant has completed appropriate training as determined by the manufacturer, technique given, and registered practitioner, and keeps a training log;
  - the patient's condition is not acute

Following the appropriate patient assessment by the treating practitioner, the assistant may prepare, apply and monitor, and remove the following treatments:

- hydro collator packs
- infra-red lamps
- ice/heat packs