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5-13-2005

### 2005-05-13 PCA Art Therapy Document from AATA

Pennsylvania Counseling Association

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## **What is Art Therapy?**

Art therapy is a distinct mental health and behavioral science profession that combines knowledge and understanding of human development and psychological and counseling theories and techniques with training in visual arts and the creative process to provide a unique approach for helping clients improve psychological health, cognitive abilities, and sensory-motor functions. The art therapist uses art media, and often the verbal processing of produced imagery, to help people resolve conflicts and problems, develop interpersonal skills, manage behavior, reduce stress, increase self-esteem and self-awareness, and achieve insight.

Art therapy uniquely provides a means of communicating for those who cannot find the words to express anxiety, pain or emotions as a result of trauma, combat, physical abuse, loss of brain function, depression, severe illness, and other debilitating health conditions. Art therapists work with diverse client populations in individual, couples, family and group therapy formats. They practice in a wide variety of settings including hospitals, schools, psychiatric and rehabilitation facilities, crisis centers, senior communities, and correctional institutions. Art therapists also work in private practice settings and can be primary or adjunctive therapists. Art therapy is integrated in comprehensive treatment plans administered by individual art therapists, or by art therapists as part of interdisciplinary team where art therapy complements and informs the work of other medical, mental health, and allied health professionals.

While art therapists share elements of their training and practice with other mental health specialties, it is the combining of psychological knowledge and counseling skills with understanding of art media, the effect of art stimulus, and the creative process that distinguishes art therapy. The qualified art therapist is required to make parallel assessments of a client's general psychological disposition and how art as a process is likely to be moderated by the individual's mental state and corresponding behavior. Recognition of the potential for art-making to reveal emotions, and knowledge and skill in safely managing the reactions it may evoke, are defining elements of art therapy as a profession.

## **Educational Qualifications and Credentials**

National requirements for professional entry into the practice of art therapy include, at minimum, a master's degree and extensive post-graduate clinical experience under the supervision of credentialed art therapists—a process which typically requires a minimum of four years. Some art therapists also have a doctorate degree. Because of the uniqueness of the study and practice of art therapy, practitioners must be trained within an approved art therapy master's degree program recognized by the American Art Therapy Association. The Association has approved thirty-nine art therapy master's degree programs at thirty-five accredited colleges and universities in twenty states and the District of Columbia. Art therapy master's level education requires training in studio art (drawing, painting, sculpture, etc.), the creative process, psychological development, group therapy, art therapy assessment, psychodiagnostics, research methods, and multicultural diversity competence. Students must also complete 100 hours of supervised practicum, and 600 hours of supervised art therapy internship. The art therapy graduate curriculum is uniquely guided by the premise that focused art-

making constitutes reflective practice and facilitates learning. The curriculum includes students' immersion in their own art practice, and art-based learning is integrated into all courses and clinical supervision.

In addition to educational requirements, the American Art Therapy Association (AATA) and the independent Art Therapy Credentials Board (ATCB) regulate the profession. AATA's Education Program Approval Board (EPAB) sets education standards for the profession and monitors compliance with educational institutions providing art therapy master's degree programs, while ATCB sets the parameters of ethical practice for the profession through the ATCB Code of Professional Practice. Following completion of the master's degree, graduates of approved programs must complete 1000 hours of direct client contact, with 100 hours of supervision, to be eligible to apply to ATCB for the ATR ("Art Therapist, Registered") credential. Those who also pass the ATCB examination become Board Certified and hold the ATR-BC credential.

### Potential Harm from Untrained Practice of Art Therapy

Art therapy recognizes the power of art and art-making to stimulate memories and reveal emotions. Understanding how art interacts with a client's psychological disposition, and how to safely manage and interpret the reactions different art processes may evoke, are competencies that must be gained through substantial experiential learning that is unique to art therapy training. The use of art as therapy thus carries risk of harm if applied beyond the competence of the practitioner. Individuals using art therapy methods and art materials in their mental health practice without appropriate or adequate academic and clinical training pose significant risk to the emotional stability of their clients. Potential risks include misinterpreting or ignoring assessments they have not been clinically trained to diagnose or treat, or eliciting adverse responses from clients that they are not properly trained to safely manage.

### The Art Therapy Profession

Art therapy is not a new profession. The therapeutic use of art was defined and developed into a discipline, first in England in the 1940's, then in the United States during the 1950's in pioneering art therapy programs at the National Institutes of Health, Menninger Foundation, Hahnemann Hospital in Philadelphia, and other distinguished medical institutions. Beginning in the 1960's, hospitals, clinics and rehabilitation centers increasingly began to include art therapy programs in addition to traditional "talk therapies," recognizing that the creative process of art making enhances recovery, health and wellness. Nearly 5,000 professional art therapists now hold ATCB credentials, over half achieving national Board Certification.

### PA Licensure Objectives

- Protection of the public: establishing art therapy specific educational/professional standards & ethics
- Title protection: people untrained in the specific practice of art therapy may not use that term or represent what they are doing as art therapy
- Tri-level professional art therapy license w/ pathway for non-art therapists to obtain AT license:
  - T-L.A.T. = Temporary, entry level for new grads of approved/accredited art therapy programs
  - L.A.T. = Mid-level w/ Board Certification from the independent Art Therapy Credentials Board
  - L.P.A.T. = Professional Art Therapy License matching PA L.P.C. experience and supervision

Representation on a licensure board to oversee and guarantee standards & protection of public

No creation of a new state board – creating independent professional art therapy license under the State Board of Social Workers, Professional Counselors and Marriage and Family Therapists with an art therapy advisory subcommittee

- National portability and reciprocity between states

*Support us for licensure*

*40 members*

*How would  
creation  
counselors  
get licensure?*

*Independent  
Counselors*

*Have member or advisory  
L.A.T. move to subcommittee...*

*Does this open the licensure  
B.I.I?*