INFORMATION FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS FROM ABROAD

A BRIEF HISTORY OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY (OT) IN SWITZERLAND

The beginnings of OT in Switzerland date back to the 1950’s. The first German-speaking school was founded in Zurich in 1957, which was followed by a second school in Lausanne (French-speaking) in 1965; in 1974, an additional school was established in Biel – also German-speaking. Since 2006, OT training has only been provided at universities of applied sciences, i.e. in Winterthur (German-speaking), Lausanne (French-speaking) and in Manno (Italian-speaking). Students complete their studies at these universities with a Bachelor of Science degree.

WORKING IN SWITZERLAND

Foreign language skills
In Switzerland, various languages play a very important role in the workforce. The country’s four official languages are:

German, French, Italian and Romansh

The most widely spoken language is Swiss German (Schweizerdeutsch), which is spoken in various dialects, and which differs considerably from standard German (Hochdeutsch). Language skills are considered sufficient if your mother tongue is German, French or Italian, or if you have completed your professional training in one of these three languages. Non-native speakers must be in possession of a language diploma in order to study in the respective language. The minimum requirement for practising in this profession, is a good oral command of the language spoken in the respective place of work.

Foreign employee work permit quotas
The number of foreigners permitted to work in Switzerland is restricted by law. Quotas vary depending on professional orientation and region (cantonal laws).

Immigration and residency regulations
Citizens of the EU and EFTA countries are granted free movement. Citizens of other countries require a visa.

For further information, refer to the Federal Office for Migration: www.bfm.admin.ch.
Work permit
As a rule, potential employers undertake the necessary steps to apply for work permits.

Working conditions
- Working hours are generally 42 hours per week
- Annual leave is a minimum of 4 weeks
- If required, the offices of the Swiss Association of Occupational Therapists (EVS) can provide information regarding starting wages
- Salary guidelines and rates vary according to canton
- Taxes and social insurances are deductible and are determined by the Federal Government, cantons, local communities and the place of work (employer)
- Health insurance in Switzerland has been obligatory since 1996, and is at the employee’s expense

Recommendations regarding vocational training and work experience:
a) A World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) and/or state recognised OT diploma. In accordance with Federal Government regulations, foreign qualifications must be recognised by the Swiss Red Cross. For further information, refer to:
   registry@redcross.ch, www.redcross.ch/activities/health/hocc/d02a02a-de.php.
b) 2 years of work experience in your own country is recommended

Job placement:
It is advisable to refer to the association’s journal when looking for job vacancies:
„ERGOTHERAPIE“— the journal of the Swiss Association of Occupational Therapists is published monthly and includes job vacancies.
Annual subscriptions for 12 issues (from January to December):
   CHF 140.-- for delivery abroad
Individual issues:
   CHF 18.-- (plus postal fees for delivery abroad)
The journal can be obtained from the offices of the Swiss Association of Occupational Therapists (EVS). (See front page for address.)
THE ASSOCIATION

The Swiss Association of Occupational Therapists (EVS) organises regular further training courses for its members (currently around 2000 members). Members belong to the respective section covering their place of domicile and are eligible to participate in professionally-related commissions and working groups. They meet on a regular basis in order to discuss current work-related topics.

Occupational therapists from abroad who work in Switzerland and possess a recognised diploma may become active members of the association (EVS).