Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS)

Code of Ethics

Preamble

Certified Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialists (COMS) recognize the significant role that independent movement plays in the overall growth and functioning of individuals with visual impairment. COMS dedicate themselves to help individuals receive the services they need, to which they are entitled, and to attain the maximum level of independence commensurate to their unique strengths, needs, abilities, goals, and preferences. A COMS develops and utilizes specialized knowledge to accomplish this goal while collaborating with other professionals. The possession of specialized knowledge obligates the COMS to protect the rights of the individuals served. The Code of Ethics provides guidance for ethical practice but is not intended to serve as an exhaustive list of every possible ethical or unethical behavior. The COMS is responsible for identifying and implementing a sound decision-making model involving professional discussions with appropriate parties when questions arise regarding ethical practices that are difficult to answer alone. To assure the public of the COMS' awareness and commitment to this obligation, the specialist commits to the Code of Ethics for COMS, henceforth referred to as the Code.

COMS pledge themselves to maintaining integrity, excellence, and accountability as it relates to their commitment to the client, the community, the profession, colleagues and other professionals, and professional employment practices. The following principles and associated standards of conduct guide this commitment.

Principle 1: The COMS will value the worth, dignity, and self-determination of each individual.

1.1. The COMS will respect the rights of the client, family, support network and/or legal representative to participate in decisions regarding the instructional program.

1.2. The COMS will collaborate with the client served to identify their needs and to make decisions about intervention that are in the best interest of the client and relevant others.

1.3. The COMS will exemplify conduct that does not discriminate or knowingly engage in behavior that is harassing or demeaning based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or on any other basis prohibited by law.

Principle 2: The COMS will respect the privacy, right to consent, and confidentiality of the client.

2.1. The COMS will obtain full informed, documented permission from the client or legal representative before releasing information to a requesting agency or individual.

2.2. The COMS will ensure all client information obtained through or stored in any medium (e.g., hard copy, audio-visual, electronic, digital) remains confidential, unless authorized to divulge this information by the client and/or legal representative, required by law or

1Along with the International Guide Dog Federation, ACVREP, throughout this COMS Handbook, uses “guide dog” as a generic term for assistance dogs that work with people who have low vision or blindness, including Seeing Eye Dogs, Leader Dogs, Pilot Dogs, etc. The term “dog guide” is used when referring to guides, comparing dog and human guides, or when agency branding is a sensitive issue.
institutional policies, or because withholding such information would endanger the well-being of the client or the public.

2.3. The COMS will ask the consent of the client served, or when applicable their family, support network or legal representative, before inviting others to observe a lesson or arranging to have the individual photographed or recorded.

2.4. The COMS, who is conducting research, will follow research ethics board procedures relevant to their jurisdiction and seek informed consent, including making clear the plan for maintaining confidentiality and the right of the participant to withdraw.

**Principle 3: The COMS will be accountable for exercising sound professional judgements.**

3.1. The COMS will adequately assess the needs and current capability of the individual client.

3.2. The COMS will make reasonable attempt to obtain, evaluate, and conduct a review of records relevant to the O&M assessment prior to instruction.

3.3. The COMS will identify and address interfering conditions and take reasonable precautionary actions.

3.4. The COMS will seek the advice and counsel of colleagues whenever such consultation is in the best interest of the client and does not jeopardize confidentiality.

3.5. The COMS will collect appropriate data to monitor client progress and determine outcomes of service.

3.6. The COMS will make all reports objective and will present only data relevant to the purposes of the evaluation and instruction. When appropriate, the specialist will share information with the client and/or the family and/or legal representative.

3.7. When planning or using alternative or new methods for instruction (e.g. remote supervision, role release, group instruction), the COMS will consider the safety and the best interest of the client, impact on team members, ethical implications of the method based on ACVREP standards, consultation with relevant professionals and jurisdiction regulations.

3.8. The COMS will evaluate the strength of evidence and applicability of content from professional development before integrating it into practice.

**Principle 4: The COMS will promote organizational and business practices that benefit clients and society.**

4.1. The COMS will ensure appropriate instructional design and implementation of lessons occur without undue consideration of personal comfort or convenience.

4.2. The COMS will be responsible for O&M services to individuals when any portion of the service is assigned to O&M students, interns or other stakeholders under his or her supervision.

4.3. The COMS supervising interns will provide adequate direct supervision to ensure intern skill development and client well-being, with decreasing supervision occurring when the COMS concludes an intern achieves applied/clinical competency.

4.4. The COMS will advocate for the rights of all individuals with visual impairments to receive appropriate services.
4.5. The COMS will not train any person to be an O&M Specialist outside of a recognized university preparation program or government-approved training program.

4.6. The COMS who is responsible for education and professional preparation programs will take reasonable steps to ensure that the programs are designed to provide the appropriate knowledge and proper experiences for students enrolled in such programs, and to meet the requirements for licensure, certification, or other goals for which claims are made by the program.

4.7. The COMS will decline position of employment where ethical principles of O&M practice are knowingly compromised or abandoned, unless the position is accepted with the intention of amending or modifying the questionable practices and providing that he or she does not participate in the behavior which violates the Code.

4.8. The COMS will only accept direct remuneration for professional instruction from a client who is also entitled to instruction through an agency or school, if the client is fully informed of the services available and elects to contract privately with the specialist.

4.9. The COMS will not engage in commercial activities that result in a conflict of interest between these activities and professional objectives with the client.

4.10. The COMS will report suspected or known negligence, illegal, or unethical behavior in the practice of the profession to appropriate authorities, in accordance with ACVREP Standards.

Principle 5: The COMS will maintain integrity in their relationships with clients, colleagues, other professionals, and the community.

5.1. With the client's consent, the COMS will endeavour to provide those involved in the individual’s life with sufficient knowledge, instruction, training and experiences relative to O&M to secure their support in facilitating the goals of the client.

5.2. The COMS will work to develop and be actively involved with Professional Learning Communities and Communities of Practice to nurture interdisciplinary teaming and collaboration including appropriate referrals, e.g., support cane, walker, wheelchair.

5.3. The COMS will endeavor to establish and maintain a trusting relationship with the client and maintain ethical standards of behavior. Any prior and/or present conflicts of interest will be managed through full disclosure and provision of services by another COMS. If another COMS is not available, the nature of the conflict/relationship will be made known to the COMS’ supervisor(s) or contracting authority for orientation and mobility services for the client’s protection and to avoid the appearance of impropriety.

5.4. The COMS will maintain good will in all activities relating to their client and will not tolerate or engage in any activity that results in the exploitation of the client. Exaggeration, sensationalism, superficiality, and other misleading activities must be avoided.

5.5. The COMS will endeavor to disseminate information to service providers involved with the client as it relates to O&M knowledge, instruction, and experiences so as to facilitate the goals of the client, provided such information does not jeopardize client confidentiality.

5.6. The COMS will graciously refuse gifts and/or gratuities leading to or influencing a conflict of interest.
5.7. The COMS will seek harmonious relations with other professionals, support people, and service providers including those chosen by the client. This includes, with the client’s or legal representative’s individual's consent, discussion regarding the benefits to be obtained from O&M services and the free exchange of ideas regarding the welfare of the client served.

5.8. In such situations where team decisions are made, the COMS will contribute information from his or her own particular perspective and will abide by the team decision unless the team decision requires that he or she act in violation of the Code of Ethics.

**Principle 6: The COMS will provide comprehensive, accurate, and objective information when representing the profession.**

6.1. The COMS will provide information regarding the various types of O&M devices and strategies, and will explore with the client which devices and strategies will best meet the specific assessed needs of the client. The COMS will not dispense or supply O&M equipment unless it is in the best interest of the client.

6.2. The COMS will contribute to community education by using formal and informal opportunities to describe the nature and delivery of O&M services, and to indicate how the community can support the self-determination of people with blindness or low vision.

6.3. The COMS will interpret and use the writing and research of others with integrity when making presentations, writing, or conducting research. This includes being familiar with and giving appropriate recognition to previous work on the topic, and giving appropriate level of credit through joint authorship or acknowledgement to those contributing significantly to research or concept development.

6.4. The COMS reviewing material submitted for presentation, publication, grant, or research proposal will respect and guard the confidentiality of and the proprietary rights in such information of those who submitted it.

6.5. The COMS will ensure the honest and accurate reporting of the nature of the service provided, credentials, fees, and charges.

**Principle 7: The COMS will enhance their expertise through lifelong learning and refinement of knowledge, skills, abilities, and professional behaviors.**

7.1. The COMS will reflect on interactions with individuals and other stakeholders to determine areas for further learning and self-improvement, and seek feedback on their own performance from colleagues and mentors in the field.

7.2. The COMS will make efforts to share their knowledge and expertise with others in the field, interns, and other professionals as a means of contributing to the lifelong learning of colleagues in the profession.