Response to Restraint Events and Police Involvement in Community Group Homes

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The Ontario Association for Behaviour Analysis (ONTABA) has been watching, with growing concern, the reported developments across the province related to the care of our most vulnerable and marginalized citizens. Last week, the Toronto Star published two pieces on the frequency of critical events, restraint usage, and police involvement in publicly-funded community group homes that are tasked with supporting at-risk youth and individuals living with intellectual disabilities, mental health issues, and other complex needs.

Restraint (e.g., restricting movement by the use of force or devices) and seclusion (e.g., separating the individual from all contact with others) should never be implemented to alleviate the financial pressure of providing care or in place of appropriate staffing, comprehensive staff training, and consultative supports. When the police are called to manage the challenging behaviour of individuals living with behavioural disorders, intellectual disabilities, or mental health issues, the established systems of necessary support have failed.

ONTABA, a non-profit professional association for Behaviour Analysts, is opposed to the inappropriate or unnecessary use of practices that restrict movement, debilitate, inflict pain, or isolate individuals. The risks of restraint and seclusion are well documented in scientific literature and range from minor injury to death. The use of seclusion, mechanical, and/or chemical restraint (i.e., sedation by medication) should never be adopted as the sole approach to managing challenging behaviour. While it is a reality that the temporary use of restraints or seclusion may be necessary for severe behaviours that pose a risk to the individual and those around them, careful planning and implementation of restraint procedures that adhere to appropriate legal, clinical, and ethical standards is required to insure the individual's right to protection and dignity under the law.

Restraint and seclusion should only be used during an emergency situation as a last resort when the risk of the continuation of the behaviour (e.g., severe self-injury) outweighs the risk involved with the procedure itself (e.g., mechanical restraint).

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) provides an effective way to assess, treat, and safely manage aggressive and self-injurious behaviours across many populations and is considered a best-practice approach when supporting individuals with intellectual disabilities and severe problem behaviour (Brosnan & Healy, 2011). Research indicates that functional behavioural assessment is the best way to determine the purpose that challenging behaviours may serve for an individual and is a necessary first step in designing effective intervention procedures and safety plans (Beavers, Iwata, and Lerman, 2013).
ABA services that are easy to access, appropriately funded, that retain manageable caseloads and include qualified clinical oversight of the services provided, are in the best interest of community stakeholders. The ONTABA Board of Directors commends the Ministry of Children and Youth Services’ initiative in working towards such service improvements, such as its current collaboration with ONTABA on regulating the practice of behaviour analysis in Ontario. An inter-ministerial response that addresses service gaps and provides community stakeholders with access to responsive, high-quality, evidence-based behaviour analytic services should be a priority of all levels of government and of community advocates across the province. ONTABA is in support of the development of a comprehensive staff training strategy, increased clinical oversight, and the development of a regulatory body which can ensure that practitioners are acting in accordance with best practices.

ONTABA, the Ontario Association for Behaviour Analysis, is an Affiliate Chapter of the Association for Behaviour Analysis International. ONTABA currently has members from professions such as education, nursing, health care and psychology, as well as applied behaviour analysis. ONTABA’s vision is to foster a culture of excellence, integrity, and expertise for the advancement and promotion of the science of behaviour analysis. Its mission is to demonstrate leadership, knowledge, and innovation in education, training, and research for the ethical and effective application of behaviour analysis.

References


