

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN MENTAL HEALTH

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Occupational Therapy (OT) is one of the profession in the multidisciplinary treatment team working in the mental health field. OT can be described as the study of human occupations - self maintenance, productivity and leisure - and the management of the adaptive behaviour which is required to perform these occupational functions. The work of the OT involves analysis of the kinds of occupation, requirements for their performance and the significance of each. Management of behaviours entails evaluation, interpretation and intervention, through treatment and consultation, for the development, remediation or maintenance of occupational performance. The unique feature of occupational therapy, which separates its knowledge from all other professions, is this study and management of purposeful activity and occupation.

The occupational therapy treatment process involves

- preliminary assessment to determine the need for OT intervention and to identify aspects that need further assessment
- formal assessment and analysis of developmental disruptions
- setting goals in relation to the individual's age, life role, sex, present development level and behaviour expected of him
- selection of activities on the basis of activity analysis
- application of selected activities to enhance remaining function and to facilitate the learning of skills, working through the emotional conflicts and redevelopment of functions that have been lost
- continuous monitoring so that the client can move on to the next level of development as soon as possible and treatment can be terminated when the goals have been achieved.

Through its base of purposeful activity and interpersonal relationships, OT is an essential part in the rehabilitation process. Among its advantages, one finds the removal of introspection; the direction of the interest and the energies of the client towards work; the maintenance of former and normal work habits; the provision of an incentive and goal; the stimulation and focusing of attention and integration; the fostering of achievement, self confidence and self esteem; socialisation and co-operation; and helping in the production of positive attitudes and decision making. Occupational therapy is also an important tool harnessed in the total

push against the effects of institutional neuroses.

OT AT MOUNT CARMEL HOSPITAL

The utilisation of occupational activities as part of the overall treatment plan was established since the inauguration of the hospital in 1861. Now carried out by a team of therapists and technical staff, the plan has as its basic foundations the achievement of function and independence by the client through a programme of activities which include:

- work activities aimed at training and tolerance prior to a return to work
- group work and / or individual counselling
- activities for self expression like art, pottery, drama and music, where one can express oneself in many forms, including non verbally
- social skills training, featuring assertion, conversation and listening skills
- domestic activities like cookery, cleaning and shopping
- physical exercises like yoga, relaxation, cycling, and anxiety management
- social, leisure and recreational activities
- community work including home visits, home adaptations and refurbishment, and the provision of a day care service to specific clients

OT AND THE MENTAL HEALTH REFORM

The current mental health reform has enabled the OT to branch out into the five main areas of admission, child and adolescence, psycho educational, psycho organic and rehabilitation. The latter featured the setting up and running of a community day centre in Qormi as part of the pilot area services.

In trying to reintroduce a structure and a routing into the daily life of the client, occupational therapy tries to overcome the apathy, neglect and loss of interest which follow the onset of mental illness. While OT is seen as playing a leading role among the remedial professions, the profession on its own is no panacea, and teamwork with the other members of staff remains essential in the overall treatment.