

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN MENTAL HEALTH

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Occupational therapy (OT) is one of the professions in the multi-disciplinary 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 behaviour 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 developmental level and behaviours 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, once found 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 focussing of attention and integration; the fostering of achievement, self confidence and self esteem; socialisation and cooperation; 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 this 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 through non verbal communication
- social skills training, featuring assertion, conversation, listening, etc.
- domestic activities like cookery, cleaning and shopping
- activities of daily living and self care
- physical exercise like yoga, relaxation, cycling, walks, etc.
- behaviour therapy and modification techniques
- social, leisure and recreational activities
- community work, including home visits and the provision of a day care service to specific clients

In trying to reintroduce a structure and a routine into the daily life of the client, occupational therapy tries to overcome the apathy, neglect and loss of interest in life 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 the staff remains essential in the overall treatment.