

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS

Assistance from an OT can help transform somebody's quality of life. Laura Swaffield explains how.

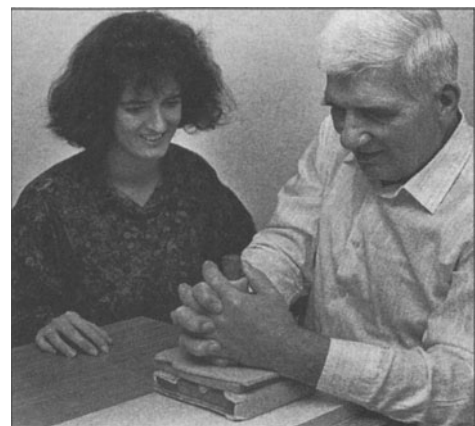
Occupational therapists (OTs) do a lot more than just keep people 'occupied'. A state registered OT (SROT) will have trained to degree level (BA or BSc) or will have an equivalent diploma (DipCOT). Whatever the setting in which OTs work, the basic job is the same: to look at each client as a whole and, in whatever way they can, to help them live as full a life as possible.

They deal with both physical and psychological problems. They do this using an individualised 'problem solving' approach. That is why the work they do is so varied and embraces children and adults whose function is impaired in any way.

You will find OTs making hand splints for people with arthritis, to prevent deformities. Or helping people with mental illness develop work and social skills. Or helping people with mental handicaps (learning disabilities) to manage daily living tasks, from eating to handling money. Or helping people with physical disabilities to make full use of their remaining abilities.

In all these cases – and more – assistance from an OT can completely transform somebody's quality of life. They help to rehabilitate people who are going to get better, and they work with people who cannot be cured and need to find ways round their disability.

Often, they recommend major 'adaptations' (such as wider doors and ramps to take a wheelchair), and equipment (such as hoists and wheelchairs) or minor 'aids' (such as



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OTs will help people overcome problems with hand movement.

small gadgets to help tip a kettle safely, easy-to-use eating utensils, dressing aids, hobby equipment, and so on).

OTs work for the NHS, in all types of hospitals and in the community (sometimes in GPs' surgeries). If you, or the person you care for, are in hospital or in contact with any community health worker, you should automatically be referred to an OT if you would benefit. If not, ask!

Local authorities also employ OTs, who visit people's homes and have an important role in assessing for equipment and adaptations. But be warned: these OTs (and funds) are very thinly spread, so you may have to wait a long time to see them. And the recommended adaptations will not necessarily be funded in full or at all. If you have waited too long, try and get to see a health service OT through your GP, or contact the College of OTs for a list of private OTs.

USEFUL INFORMATION

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