



## Information Bulletin

### What is Occupational Therapy?

Occupational Therapy (OT) helps people develop, improve or regain the ability to live as independently as possible. Our name comes from the fact that we are concerned with all the things people do on a daily basis while engaged in the "*occupation of living*." This includes just about everything an individual does from the moment they wake up to the time they go to bed. As you can imagine, this encompasses a wide range of activities. It is perhaps this reason why Occupational Therapy is often difficult to explain. The overall goal of the Occupational Therapist is to increase a person's ability to perform all these tasks and activities as independently as possible with the greatest amount of self-satisfaction.

Occupational Therapists work in a variety of settings with people who are faced with all types of challenges. OT's work with infants, schoolchildren, adolescents, adults and seniors. OT's assist people in overcoming physical, cognitive and psychological impairments in order to lead productive and fulfilling lives.

#### **Areas of Concern for Occupational Therapy:**

As mentioned already, Occupational Therapists assist people to regain independence in doing all the daily tasks they need to do, want to do, and simply enjoy doing. These tasks and activities have been divided into three categories. Together, they represent the areas in which OT's look to improve function:

1. Activities of Daily Living
2. School and Work
3. Play and Leisure

#### **Activities of Daily Living (or ADLs):**

This category includes all the things individuals do to take care of themselves physically, emotionally and socially. Self-care tasks like bathing, dressing, eating meals, brushing hair and teeth are a large part of what make up Activities of Daily Living (or ADLs). Mobility, or how well an individual can get from one place to another, is also a part of Activities of Daily Living. Mobility treatment can involve everything from improving a individual's ability to get

out of bed and moving from room to room to being able to drive a car and use public transportation. The last part of Activities of Daily Living is how well individuals can relate to others, in both social settings and in their personal lives. This includes establishing and maintaining healthy social relationships, developing a close relationship with a partner and issues of intimacy.

How well individuals can perform these tasks is often central to how they feel about themselves. For many, self-care and mobility are things that are taken for granted. It is only after the completion of these tasks suddenly becomes difficult – following an accident or injury – that individuals begin to fully appreciate how important they are to their feelings of self-esteem.

### **The Impact of Cognitive Deficits on Activities of Daily Living:**

Following a brain injury, the ability to perform many of these activities is frequently diminished. Often, because of physical impairments, but more times than not there are accompanying problems with cognition and behavioral control. These problems can be just as debilitating and can interfere with daily functioning just as much if not more. These deficits are not as easily seen and tend to be highly complex in nature. As a result, their impact on the brain injury survivor is not as easily understood by friends and family members or by the individuals themselves.

Cognitive deficits can vary from decreased alertness, difficulties in concentrating, decreased problem solving, problems initiating tasks, an inability to shift from one thought to another or problems with memory to mention but a few. You can imagine how difficulties in any one of these areas could negatively impact a person's ability to function on a daily basis.

### **The Impact of Behavioral Control on Activities of Daily Living:**

Just as cognitive problems can impact an individual's ability to perform necessary daily tasks, so can problems with behavioral control. Following a brain injury the ability to self-regulate behaviors is often affected. The brain injury survivor may have difficulty tolerating frustration and dealing with anger. They may become overly aggressive or even strike out at others when confused or frustrated.

### **School and Work:**

Occupational Therapy intervention includes assessing how well a person functions while performing a work related task of some kind. The term "work" is used in its broadest sense and includes volunteering, being a student, performing housework or being gainfully employed. For many, their work forms the basis of how they see themselves as individuals. Very often the individual's job is associated with the "role" they see themselves fulfilling: breadwinner, teacher, wife/husband, student or our particular job title. When the ability to work is affected by an accident or injury, people frequently experience a loss of self-worth and purpose due to this loss of life role.

Much of the treatment involved in Occupational Therapy includes assisting individuals to overcome physical, emotional or cognitive barriers, allowing them to lead more productive lives.

**In Conclusion:**

Occupational Therapy is a highly specialized healthcare and rehabilitative therapy, which seeks to restore an individual's ability to live as independently as possible. It considers the entire individual; physically, emotionally and socially. Occupational Therapy focuses heavily on an individual's environment as a means of facilitating independence. Occupational Therapists seek to eliminate barriers to improved function by a process of remediation (correcting the problem) and/or compensation (modifying the environment to accommodate the problem thus lessening its effect).