

Art Therapist



History

Although visual expressions have been basic to humanity throughout history, art therapy did not emerge as a distinct profession until the 1930s. At the beginning of the 20th century, psychiatrists became interested in and began studying artwork done by patients to research a possible link between a patient's art and his/her illness. At this same time, art educators were discovering that the free and spontaneous art expression of children represented both emotional and symbolic communications.

Educator and psychotherapist Margaret Naumburg is considered the founder of art therapy as a separate profession in the United States. The profession's first journal, the *Bulletin of Art Therapy* (today the *American Journal of Art Therapy*), was published in 1961. The American Art Therapy Association, Inc (AATA) was founded in 1969. AATA sponsors annual conferences, regional symposia, approves educational programs, and publishes *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association* (first published in 1983). In the 1970s, the first graduate degrees in art therapy were awarded; today, college curricula across the country include undergraduate introductory courses and preparatory programs in art therapy, as well as 33 master's degree programs approved by AATA.



Occupational Description

Art therapy is a human service profession that uses art media, images, the creative art process, and patient/client responses to the artwork as reflections of an individual's development, abilities, personality, interests, concerns, and conflicts. Art therapy, through the nonverbal qualities of art media, can help individuals access and express memories, trauma, and intrapsychic conflict often not easily reached with words. Art therapy helps individuals reconcile their emotions, foster self-awareness, increase self-esteem, develop their social skills, manage behavior, solve problems, and reduce anxiety.



Job Description

Art therapists use drawings and other art/media forms to assess, treat, and rehabilitate patients with mental, emotional, physical, and/or developmental disorders.

Art therapists use and facilitate the art process, providing materials, instruction, and structuring of tasks tailored either to individuals or groups. Using their skills of assessment and interpretation, they understand and plan the appropriateness of materials applicable to the client's therapeutic needs.

With the growing acceptance of alternative therapies and increased scientific understanding of the link between mind, body, and spirit, art therapy is becoming more prevalent as a parallel and supportive therapy for almost any medical condition. For example, art therapists work with cancer, burn, pain, HIV-positive, asthma, and substance abuse patients, among others, in pediatric, geriatric, and other settings.

Art therapists also maintain appropriate charts, records, and periodic reports on patient progress as required by agency guidelines and professional standards; participate in professional staff meetings and conferences; and provide information and consultation regarding the client's clinical progress. They also may function as supervisors, administrators, consultants, and expert witnesses.

An art therapist must be sensitive to human needs and expressions and possess emotional stability, patience, a capacity for insight into psychological processes, and an understanding of art media. An art therapist also must be an attentive listener and keen observer and be able to develop a rapport with people. Flexibility and a sense of humor are important in adapting to changing circumstances, frustration, and disappointment.



Employment Characteristics

Art therapists work in private offices, art rooms, or meeting rooms in facilities such as medical and psychiatric hospitals, outpatient facilities, clinics, residential treatment centers, day treatment centers, rehabilitation centers, halfway houses, shelters, schools and universities, correctional facilities, elder care facilities, pain clinics, and art studios.

The art therapist may work as part of a team that includes physicians, psychologists, nurses, rehabilitation counselors, social workers, and teachers. Together, they determine and implement a client's therapeutic, school, or mental health program. Art therapists also work as primary therapists in private practice.

Earnings for art therapists vary, depending on type of practice, job responsibilities, and practice location. The average entry-level income is approximately \$25,000, median income is between \$28,000 and \$40,000, and top earning potential for salaried administrators is between \$40,000 and \$60,000. Art therapists who possess doctoral degrees and/or state licensure or who qualify in their state to conduct a private practice can earn \$75 to \$120 per hour in private practice.



Educational Programs

Length. Art therapy master's degree programs are no less than 2 years and must include a minimum of 24 graduate credit hours in the art therapy core curriculum.

Prerequisites. Applicants must hold a baccalaureate degree from an accredited US institution or have equivalent academic preparation from an institution outside the United States. In addition, prospective students must submit a portfolio of original artwork and must document 15 semester hours in studio art and 12 semester hours in psychology.

Curriculum. The core curriculum for art therapy includes history, theory, and practice techniques of art therapy; psychopathology; assessment of patients and diagnostic categories; and practice standards, ethical and legal issues, and matters of cultural diversity related to art therapy.



Licensure, Certification, and Registration

The Art Therapy Credentials Board, Inc (ATCB), an independent, nonprofit organization, grants postgraduate registration (ATR) after reviewing documentation of completion of graduate education and supervised postgraduate experience. The registered art therapist who successfully completes the written examination administered by the ATCB is qualified as Board Certified (ATR-BC). Recertification is required every 5 years by examination or by documentation of continuing education credits (CECs).



Inquiries

Education, Program Approval, Careers, Resources
American Art Therapy Association, Inc (AATA)
1202 Allanson Rd
Mundelein, IL 60060-3808
888 290-0878
847 949-6064
847 566-4580 Fax
E-mail: info@arttherapy.org

Registration/Certification

Art Therapy Credentials Board, Inc (ATCB)
3 Terrace Way, Ste B
Greensboro, NC 27403
877 213-2822
336 547-0017 Fax
E-mail: info@atcb.org
www.atcb.org