

Occupational Therapy Assistant

Under the supervision of and in collaboration with an occupational therapist, the occupational therapy assistant provides services to clients focusing on participation in selected activities to restore, reinforce, and enhance performance; facilitate learning of those skills and functions essential for adaptation and participation; diminish or correct pathology; and promote and maintain health and wellness. A fundamental concern is the development and maintenance of the skill and capacity throughout the lifespan to perform with satisfaction to self and others meaningful tasks and roles essential to social participation and to the mastery of self and the environment. Under the supervision of and in partnership with the occupational therapist, the occupational therapy assistant participates in the development of adaptive skills and performance capacity and is concerned with factors that promote, influence, or enhance performance, as well as those that serve as barriers or impediments to the individual's occupational performance. The occupational therapy assistant provides service to those clients whose abilities to perform meaningful activities of living are threatened or impaired by:

- Developmental deficits
- The aging process
- Poverty and cultural differences
- Physical injury or illness
- Psychological or social disability



Career Description

A contemporary entry-level occupational therapy assistant must:

- Have acquired an educational foundation in the liberal arts and sciences, including a focus on issues related to diversity
- Be educated as a generalist, with a broad exposure to the delivery models and systems utilized in settings where occupational therapy is currently practiced and where it is emerging as a service
- Have achieved entry-level competence through a combination of academic and fieldwork education
- Be prepared to work under the supervision of and in cooperation with the occupational therapist
- Be prepared to articulate and apply occupational therapy principles, intervention approaches and rationales, and expected outcomes as these relate to occupational performance of the client
- Be prepared to be a lifelong learner and keep current with best practice
- Uphold the ethical standards, values, and attitudes of the occupational therapy profession



Employment Characteristics

Occupational therapy assistants assist in the planning and implementation of treatment of a diverse population in a variety of settings, such as nursing homes, hospitals and clinics, rehabilitation facilities, long-term care facilities, extended care facilities, sheltered workshops, schools and camps, private homes, and community agencies.



Salary

AOTA studies conducted in 2006 indicate that the average entry-level salary for occupational therapy assistants is approximately \$33,000. For more information, refer to www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.



Educational Programs

Length. Education may be acquired in either a 2-year associate degree program or a 1- to 2-year certificate program. Effective July 1, 2013, however, occupational therapy assistant education will no longer be offered at the certificate level. These technical-level education programs are located in 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities, and postsecondary vocational/technical schools and institutions and include academic and fieldwork components, as do the professional level programs. Following completion of all educational requirements, individuals take a national certification examination. Many states also regulate the practice of occupational therapy assistants.

Prerequisites. High school diploma or equivalent. A foundation of liberal arts and biological, physical, social, and behavioral sciences may be prerequisite to, or concurrent with, the technical education of the program curriculum.

Curriculum. Curricula of accredited occupational therapy assistant programs are required to include a broad foundation of the liberal arts and sciences, basic tenets of occupational therapy, the process of screening and evaluation, the process of intervention and implementation, context of service delivery, assistance in the management of occupational therapy services, use of professional literature, professional ethics, values, and responsibilities, and 16 weeks of fieldwork education.



Licensure, Registration, Certification

All states, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the District of Columbia regulate the practice of occupational therapy. To obtain a license, applicants must graduate from an accredited occupational therapy assistant educational program and pass a national certification examination for occupational therapy assistants. Those who pass the exam are awarded the title "Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA)". Some states have additional requirements for therapists who work in schools or early intervention programs. These requirements may include education-related classes, an education practice certificate, or early intervention certification requirements.



Inquiries

Careers Education

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