

Occupational therapist

Join the team and make a difference

Occupational therapists help people to come to terms with physical, psychological and social difficulties caused by illness, injury or disability – enabling them to lead fuller, more independent lives. This profession plays an important role in the shift from hospital to home and community care for the patient.

What will you be doing?

Your starting point with new clients will be to make assessments of what they are able to do and prepare a treatment plan that describes the support they need. You'll build a rounded picture of each patient's abilities and circumstances so that they can live as independently as possible. For example, you could be helping a recovering stroke patient to use cutlery again, restoring confidence in social situations and making sure that the patient's home environment matches his or her needs.

You'll be working with clients on many levels at the same time: practical, mental and



social. This means you will also be dealing with a range of other people who are involved: families and carers, other healthcare staff, social workers, local authorities and housing departments. You will need a strong practical streak, for example to identify where best to locate handrails in someone's house. However, just as important is an awareness of the clinical and social factors that affect how someone feels and behaves.

Where will you work?

You are likely to carry out therapy in some or all of the following settings:

- hospitals, helping prepare patients for safe discharge home
- clinics and local health centres
- the community, visiting people at home or in care homes
- with charities, social services and other agencies
- mental health services
- schools, workplaces and prisons.

What skills and qualities will you need?

- a practical, creative approach
- the ability to see the many different factors that can affect someone's outlook
- good communication and negotiating skills
- the ability to relate to a wide range of people – patients, carers and colleagues
- the ability to combine a range of different activities
- a responsible, professional approach, supporting the best interests of your clients

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Much of the time you will be working one to one with clients, teaching coping strategies and using activities to stimulate their interest and engage them in everyday living. You will also spend time discussing individual cases with others and negotiating the support that you think your client needs. No two days will ever be the same.

What entry routes are available?

To become an occupational therapist in the NHS, you will need a qualification recognised by the Health Professions Council (HPC): either a BSc in occupational therapy, or an approved postgraduate qualification if you already have a degree.

Most BSc programmes take three years, full time, combining study with work placements. The postgraduate programme will usually take two years. Part-time courses are also available. The NHS provides financial support to eligible students on NHS-funded courses. For more information, visit www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/students

Once you have the qualification, you will need to register with the HPC to practise as an occupational therapist.

Occupational therapy support workers assist qualified staff with carrying out treatments, arranging specific equipment needs, and some aspects of client assessment. For example, a technical instructor might assist with the preparation, installation and use of aids and equipment. For this type of role, some craft skills/experience and qualifications

might be useful. There are no formal educational requirements for these roles, and in-service training combined with part-time study can open the way for entry to a degree course and professional qualification. For further information, see the clinical *support worker* factsheet.

How can you develop your career?

As your clinical experience grows you can move into more senior posts and specialise in working with a particular group of clients such as stroke patients or people with learning disabilities. You will have the opportunity to do further study and research in your chosen specialism, and you can become involved in teaching.

As well as moving to more senior and specialised roles within this area, you will also have the chance to take on additional responsibilities and progress within the organisation, as part of the Career Framework. For more information about this initiative please see the *Careers in the allied health professions* booklet.

Pay

The national pay system in the NHS is called Agenda for Change (AfC). This applies to all staff except doctors, dentists and very senior managers. These are examples of roles and the AfC bands at which they may be paid: occupational therapist (Band 5); occupational therapist specialist (Band 6); occupational therapist advanced (Band 7). To find out more about pay bands, and to see the most up-to-date salary information, visit

www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/payandbenefits

For more information on the range of opportunities available in the allied health professions, please visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/qualifications. This gives more specific details about what qualifications are necessary for each role. You can search for current vacancies and download job descriptions at www.jobs.nhs.uk

To find out more about careers in the allied health professions, please visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/working

For more information on the professional bodies relevant to the allied health professions, visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/contacts