Sharing the care: getting to know your team

Occupational therapy and dementia care

Occupational therapists work alongside people living with dementia and their carers to enable them to continue living independently in the community.

Successful occupational therapy intervention includes enhancing function, promoting relationships and social participation, and finding ways for those with dementia to enjoy life.

About occupational therapy

Occupational therapy is a client-centred health profession concerned with promoting health and wellbeing through occupation.

Occupational therapists are qualified health professionals who work with people of all ages and abilities to do the things they need and want to in all aspects of life, such as taking care of oneself and others, working, volunteering, and participating in hobbies, interests and social events. Occupational therapists call these things “occupations”.

The primary goal of occupational therapy is to enable people to participate in the occupations of everyday life.

Occupational therapists work with a variety of other professionals with the outcome of facilitating a common goal that is directed by the patient.

Referral information

You can refer to an occupational therapist at any time however early referral following a dementia diagnosis is encouraged.

Occupational therapists working in not-for-profit community organisations receive referrals either via the My Aged Care website or directly from community service providers.

General Practitioners, practice nurses and other allied health professionals are able to lodge a referral through the My Aged Care website, or can contact a community care provider directly.

Find a private practice OT

Private practitioners can be found on the Occupational Therapy Australia association website, listed under location and area of expertise.

www.otaus.com.au
**Costs**

Private occupational therapy service fees will be dependent upon the individual clinician’s fees.

Clients receiving Commonwealth Health Support Programme (CHSP) services will be charged a rate in accordance with the fees set out by the individual occupational therapist, and is dependent upon the assessment/intervention provided.

Clients who have a Home Care Package (HCP) are able to use their funds for an occupational therapy assessment/intervention as a part of their package.

Clients who are either receiving CHSP services or level 1 or 2 HCP are eligible for Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme (MASS) funding, to assist with purchasing equipment to support them in their home environment.

**Tip:** Encourage carers to contact the private occupational therapist prior to an appointment to find out fees, or provide your patient with details of the expected costs at the time of referral.

**Questions to ask your patients**

- *Are you experiencing any difficulties managing any of your daily living activities at home, including personal care and instrumental activities of daily living? (e.g. managing money, driving, household activities)*

- *Are you currently receiving any services to assist you with your daily activities?*

- *Are you receiving a Home Care Package from a community service provider?*

Occupational therapists can determine what is working well in the daily routine of the person with dementia, and provide supports to ensure that the person’s skills are maintained for as long as possible.

Providing education for the family, care providers, and clients, and promoting the person’s strengths, will ensure that those with dementia and their care providers have the support needed to live life to its fullest.

Modifying the environment and or/activity is perhaps the most frequently used intervention for those with dementia, as it ensures safe and supportive environments through adaptation and compensation.

Occupational therapists have expertise and skill in the use of assistive technology to promote independence and autonomy, manage potential safety risks around the home and reduce stress for both the person living with dementia and their carer.
Occupational therapists possess expertise in understanding the intricate relationship between the person, environment and occupation that is required for successful task performance.

For persons with dementia, cognitive impairment impacts sensory processing and motor planning, resulting in decreased ability to function in daily living activities.

The role of the occupational therapist is to find the best or just-right fit between the environmental and task demands and the cognitive ability of the patient.

A patient-centred plan will consider meaningful and realistic occupations for the person with dementia, strategies for maintaining the person’s safety, as well as strategies that enhance the caregiver’s support while easing some of the stress of caregiving.

References

Further information

Your feedback
The video series that accompanies this fact sheet has been developed to assist health professionals to increase their knowledge and awareness of the many diverse allied health disciplines, sub-specialties, and referral pathways in primary care to improve patient outcomes in our community.

If you have any questions or feedback please email: alliedhealth@bsphn.org.au