



Backgrounder on Occupational Therapists

Occupational Therapy is a health care profession which provides many wide-ranging services to a variety of people from infants to older adults. Occupational Therapy is provided to people who have problems with their ability to perform normal activities of daily living. This may be due to many different causes including physical injury, emotional or developmental problems, stroke, elective surgery, chronic disease, aging and birth defects to name a few.

The goal of Occupational Therapy is to maximize the ability of each individual to perform self-care, work and leisure activities to the best of their physical, emotional and cognitive abilities; to help people re-learn skills needed to live independent, productive and satisfying lives.

The Occupational Therapist develops a treatment plan, as well as goals for therapy, many times in collaboration with the physician and patient.

Pediatric (children) and geriatric (the elderly) patients benefiting from occupational therapy services may have conditions related to orthopedic, neurological, psychiatric and other conditions. Diagnoses often referred to Occupational Therapy include: autism, head trauma, hand and upper extremity injuries/conditions, stroke (CVA), total hip/knee replacements, cerebral palsy, sensory integration deficits, depression, cancer, and arthritis among others.

Therapeutic treatments provided by Occupational Therapists are many. Examples include:

- Assistance with Specialized Seating (such as wheelchairs)
- Coordination training
- Exercises to increase motion and/or strength
- Fabrication of splints for protection/positioning and prevention of contractures
- Handwriting and fine motor instruction
- Instruction in the use of adaptive equipment
- Return to work programs
- Sensory integration techniques
- Stress management and time management
- Training in Activities of Daily living (dressing, bathing, grooming, etc)
- Transfer training to help patients get into and out of bed, bathtub, toilet, chair, etc.

Canada-wide statistics for 2010, released recently by the *Canadian Institute for Health Information* (CIHI), show that Saskatchewan had only 25.8 occupational therapists per 100-thousand people. That was the lowest rate anywhere in Canada, and well below the national average of 38.1 occupational therapists per 100-thousand population. 2010 marked the fourth straight year that Saskatchewan had the lowest level of occupational therapists in Canada.

Health Sciences is the union which represents more than three-thousand specialized health care professionals from more than thirty health care professions. Members include: Emergency care workers like Paramedics; Acute care workers like Hospital Pharmacists, Perfusionists, and Respiratory Therapists; Rehab professionals like Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists and Speech Language Pathologists; and Community-based professionals like Public Health Inspectors, Psychologists and Social Workers.