Occupational therapist

Job description
An occupational therapist assesses and treats physical and psychological conditions in patients to maximise their levels of independence in everyday life. Therapists work with a wide variety of people whose problems may be congenital or the result of an accident, ageing or lifestyle.

Occupational therapy is a client-centred health profession concerned with promoting health and well being through occupation. It involves enabling individuals and groups to do the things that they need and want to do in everyday life, and assists people to develop and maintain a meaningful lifestyle.

The therapy involves a process of assessment, action planning, and reviewing, enabling patients to target obstacles in their lives, tackle them effectively, and make the most of their lives and activities. The therapist focuses on three areas as follows: The individual person - improving or maintaining their level of physical, cognitive (thinking), affective (emotional) and social ability. The environment - manipulating or adapting the physical, social, cultural and institutional environment. The task - analysing the task, comparing the demands of the task with the individual's abilities, and changing the task to make it possible for the person to do.

Work activities
- Making sure that homes, workplaces and public places are accessible for people with specific needs.
- Carrying out an assessment of an individual's ability to function in relation to the normal requirements of living – dressing, eating, interacting socially and so on.
- Visiting a disabled or elderly person to make their home easier and safer for them to use.
- Assessing home arrangements and deciding as to what assistance is needed, by way of appliances such as wheelchairs and chair lifts.
- Arranging for the provision of some appropriate aids and appliances by the Health Service Executive (HSE) or certifying eligibility for the disabled person's grant.
- Advising schools to help children overcome writing difficulties and other learning challenges.
- Easing the transition back into the home after being hospitalised.
- Improving the play and movement skills of a baby or child with a disability.
- Assessing the driving ability of someone with a disability.
- Working with builders, architects and local authorities to design public places and homes that will suit people with various different abilities.
- Working with people with mental health difficulties to assist them in planning and organising a meaningful lifestyle.
- Maintaining and advancing professional knowledge and keeping up with technical and clinical progress in order to offer clients the best treatment available.

Work conditions
Travel: during the working day can be frequent as therapists may work in several different locations, including patients’ homes.

Working hours: mainly office hours Monday–Friday with possibility of extra hours. Some occupational therapists work evenings and weekends, particularly if they work in mental health, accident and emergency services and in private practice.

Location: mainly in large towns or cities throughout the country.

Opportunities for self-employment: often possible.

Typical employers
- Public and private hospitals
- Rehabilitation units
- Residential and nursing homes
- Schools
- Community health centres.
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#### Career development

Most newly qualified occupational therapists work with a general caseload for at least a year, before choosing a type of clinical work in which to specialise. As clinical experience grows so too do opportunities to move into more senior posts and specialise in working with a particular group of clients. There are opportunities for further study and development of specialised expertise in areas such as physical and psychiatric rehabilitation, hand therapy, health services management, learning disability, disability studies and community occupational therapy. Others move into research, teaching or management.

#### Salaries

Republic of Ireland: Starting salaries are in excess of €37,000 and rise to in excess of €78,000 for Occupational Therapist Manager-in-Charge Grade III.

UK/Northern Ireland: A newly qualified occupational therapist can earn in the region of £20,000. A more experienced occupational therapist can earn over £40,000 while a consultant occupational therapist can earn between £63,000 and £79,000.

#### Entry requirements and training

Republic of Ireland: Occupational therapy is one of the 12 designated professionals to be regulated by the Health and Social Care Professionals Council. Once the register is fully established, only professionals registered with the relevant registration board may use the protected professional title.

UK/Northern Ireland: In order to practice in the UK as an occupational therapist, you must be registered with the Health Professions Council.

There are four courses (see below) leading to a qualification in Occupational Therapy in the Republic of Ireland. A three year undergraduate programme, leading to an honours degree is also available at the University of Ulster at Jordanstown.

#### Specific degree subjects required

An undergraduate or postgraduate degree in occupational therapy accredited by Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland (AOTI) and the World Federation of Occupational Therapists WOT.

**National University of Ireland, Galway**
B.Sc. (Hons) Occupational Therapy

**Trinity College**
BSc (Hons) Occupational Therapy

**University College Cork**
B.Sc. (Hons) Occupational Therapy

**University of Limerick**
M.Sc. OT (Professional Qualification)

#### Postgraduate study

A pre-entry postgraduate qualification is not a requirement for those with an undergraduate degree in Occupational Therapy accredited by AOTI. A two-year full time graduate-entry MSc in Occupational Therapy is offered by the University of Limerick (UL).

For practising occupational therapists, a number of universities offer opportunities for continuing professional development, including postgraduate degrees. Graduates can apply to undertake either a master’s level or a doctoral degree by research.

#### Specific entry requirements

To ensure the safety and health of students and their future patients, students are normally required to undergo Garda/Police vetting before commencing their degree as well as being required to undertake a health check. Students are normally required to provide evidence of immunisation against Hepatitis B, BCG, Varicella (Chickenpox), Measles Mumps and Rubella (MMR) before going on placement.

Prospective students for some programmes must have completed training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation.
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(CPR) with automated external defibrillator (AED) training.

A driving licence and access to vehicle may be required on appointment.

Training

The practical components of the courses are very important. A minimum of 1,000 hours of practice education (fieldwork) is required as described in the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT).

Tips for applications

Do your research – visit an occupational therapy service, or at least talk to an occupational therapist to improve your understanding of the profession. Join the Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland as a student member.

Skills and qualities

- Ability to build and maintain good relationships with a wide range of people and enjoy working with people of all ages.
- Capacity to listen carefully combined with excellent verbal and written communication skills.
- Patience, tact and empathy to people’s needs.
- Practical, creative, Problem-solver with a ‘can-do’ attitude.
- Ingenuity, enthusiasm, common sense, and a sound knowledge base.
- Ability to see the many different factors that can affect someone’s outlook.
- Excellent leadership qualities and negotiating skills.
- Ability to combine a range of different activities.
- Ability to make your own decisions as well as work in cooperation with others.
- Responsible, professional approach, respecting client confidentiality.

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