

Occupational Therapy in the Emergency Department

What is Occupational Therapy?

Life is made up of meaningful everyday activities or occupations, such as walking the dog, gardening, preparing a meal, painting, doing the laundry and playing games. Occupations are part of life; they describe who we are and how we feel about ourselves. Occupations help bring meaning to life.

When we cannot participate in daily occupations, due to injury, illness, disability or social and environmental circumstances, occupational therapists help find solutions to address the meaningful everyday activities of life. Occupational therapy also helps prevent disability or illness and enhances the way we participate in our communities and lives. Occupational therapy helps us engage in the occupation of living.



What is the Emergency Department?

The emergency department is a medical treatment facility that specializes in emergency medicine, usually located in a hospital or primary care center. The department provides initial treatment for a variety of illnesses and injuries, some of which may be life-threatening and require immediate attention.

According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), more than 10 million emergency department visits were reported in 2013-2014. One million of which were hospitalized after their initial assessment. Emergency departments cost Canadian hospitals approximately \$1.8 billion a year.

How do occupational therapists help?

As part of an interprofessional health team, occupational therapists have a vital role in the emergency department. Occupational therapists are uniquely positioned to provide assessments and rehabilitation as well as focus on the quality of care received. Occupational therapists can be directly involved in several aspects of patient assessment at emergency department as well as helping in making complex decision on admissions and discharges, eliminating unnecessary admissions to the hospital.

What do occupational therapists do?

- Provide assessment and recommendation on admissions
- Identify and recommend appropriate adaptive equipment and services
- Connect the client to primary care and community services
- Advocate for the client and their individual needs
- Promote occupational therapy's role within the emergency department

Where do occupational therapists work?

Occupational therapists work with health care and other professionals in a variety of places, such as long term care facilities, community support services, family health teams, hospitals and clients' homes. Occupational therapists also work with organizations, such as government, policy makers, care providers and community agencies to develop programs and resources.

Occupational therapy works!

Louise is a doctor working in the emergency room. Many of the people who come to the emergency department do not get admitted to the hospital and must go home even if their living environment is not optimal for their physical capacities. Despite a limited budget, she hired an occupational therapist. The occupational therapist ensures the safety of clients by assessing the client's capacity for the activities of daily living, recommending appropriate equipment and services and educating the client and family on their use to ensure safety. Louise feels more confident in sending her clients home after they've seen an occupational therapist.