About the occupational therapy profession

Occupational therapy is a health care profession focused on helping individuals perform everyday activities that are important and meaningful to their health and well-being. Occupational therapy practitioners work with people of all ages, whose lives are challenged due to traumatic injury, illness, developmental deficits or aging.

In its simplest terms, occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants help people across the lifespan participate in the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of everyday activities (occupations).

Occupational therapy assistants are trained to:

- use technical and therapeutic skills to help clients regain, develop or master daily life skills in order to live an independent, productive, and quality life
- work closely with and under the direction of occupational therapists
- plan and implement therapeutic activities tailored to the client’s goals and based on treatment principles for cognitive, neurological, musculoskeletal and developmental rehabilitation
- work as a team member with medical staff such as therapists, nurses, physicians, psychologists, and educators

Certified occupational therapy assistants in Washington State have:

- earned an associate’s degree from an accredited OTA program
- passed clinical training and clinical internships
- passed a national board certification exam and obtained a state license to practice as a certified occupational therapy assistant (COTA).

To learn more about occupational therapy assistants, visit http://www.wois.org/use/occs/viewer.cfm?occnum=100392 or http://www.aota.org.

U.S. Department of Labor statistics for occupational therapy assistants

According to the U.S. Department of Labor’s 2014-2015 edition of the Occupational Outlook Handbook, the median annual wage of occupational therapy assistants was $53,240 in 2012. Employment of occupational therapy assistants is expected to increase 43 percent from 2010 to 2020, much faster than the average for all occupations.

Demand for occupational therapy is expected to rise significantly over the coming decade in response to the health needs of the aging baby-boom generation and a growing elderly population. Demand for occupational therapy assistants is also expected to stem from healthcare providers employing more assistants to reduce the cost of occupational therapy services. After the therapist has evaluated a patient and designed a treatment plan, the occupational therapy assistant can provide many aspects of the treatment that the therapist prescribed.

To read more about the national job outlook for occupational therapy assistants, go to http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/occupational-therapy-assistants-and -aides.htm.