

JULY: RECREATIONAL THERAPY

WHAT IS IT?

Recreational therapy ("RT") is defined by the American Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA) as a health care and human service discipline that delivers treatment designed to restore, rehabilitate and/or remedy functional injuries, disabilities and chronic illnesses. RT is listed as a rehabilitation therapy service by Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) standards as well as the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), both agencies that survey hospitals and clinics for quality of healthcare services. Also, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) include recreational therapy in the mix of treatment and rehabilitation services used to determine federal compliance in skilled nursing, rehabilitation (physical and psychiatric) and long-term care facilities.

RT may be provided in the acute inpatient hospital setting, outpatient "rehab" facilities, residential facilities, adult day care programs, hospice care, community centers and some school systems. "Rec" therapists may work with a wide range of clients, including geriatric, mental health, addiction, rehabilitation, developmentally disabled and pediatric clients.

HOW DID RECREATIONAL THERAPY DEVELOP?

The "RT" profession can be traced back to the 1850's when Florence Nightengale, the nursing pioneer, proposed that recreational activities were important in the quality of human life. In 1931, the American Red Cross began hiring "recreation hospital workers". The term "recreational therapy" was first coined by the Menninger brothers who were enthusiastic for the inclusion of recreational therapy as a treatment of persons with mental health disorders. Since the 1940's, recreational therapists have served as active members of the interdisciplinary treatment team addressing the psycho-social and physical rehabilitation needs of the patient/client.

HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM OTHER THERAPIES?

Recreational therapy utilizes a broader definition of health – not only the absence of "illness", but enhanced physical, emotional, social and leisure development, so the client may participate fully and independently in life pursuits. It uses recreational modalities as intervention strategies, incorporating the client's interests, family and/or community to make the process meaningful... and fun! The RT weaves the concept of healthy living into treatment to ensure both improved function and optimal independence and enjoyment in life activities.

EDUCATION, QUALIFICATIONS & CREDENTIALS OF A RECREATIONAL THERAPIST...

A qualified recreational therapist is one who is nationally certified as a certified therapeutic recreation specialist (CTRS), usually referred to as "RTs". Qualified professionals are certified through the National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification (NCRTC), which requires a bachelors degree or higher from an accredited university, a formal internship and the passing of a national certification examination. In addition, CTRSs must maintain their credential every five years through a recertification process.

Academic programs in RT emphasize course work in the physical, biological and behavioral sciences, and recreation and leisure theory. They also require an internship under the supervision of a CTRS.



THE FUTURE OF RECREATIONAL THERAPY

The older population – persons 65 years or older – numbered 35.6 million in 2002. By 2030, there will be about 71.5 million older persons, more than twice their number in 2002. According to the US Department of Labor, "The rapidly growing number of older adults is expected to spur job growth for recreational therapy professionals in assisted-living facilities, adult daycare programs, and other social assistance agencies. Continued growth also is expected in community residential care facilities, as was daycare programs for individuals with disabilities."

Individuals with disabling conditions represent a large and growing sector of the population that needs healthcare services. Individuals with disabling conditions spend significantly less time outside the home, socializing and going out, than individuals without disabilities. They tend to feel more isolated, and participate in fewer community activities than their non-disabled counterparts. Opportunities to provide recreational therapy services will continue to be an important factor in the healthcare of these individuals.

Promotion of pro-active health and wellness programs has become a focus of the healthcare industry. Leisure activities help us to remain healthy and independent, and those who need assistance in this area will benefit from recreational therapy programs!

For more information, speak to your healthcare professional, or go to

<http://www.nctrc.org>,

<http://www.atra-tr.org/curriculumguide.htm>.

<http://stats.bls.gov/oco/ocos082.htm>

<http://www.aoa.gov/prof/statistics/statistics.asp>

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