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# Body of work

Therapists help others  
meet physical challenges

November 24, 2002

A career in physical, occupational or recreational therapy can be challenging, frustrating and tiring, but the rewards - both emotional and financial - have made it a field that continues to attract men and women looking for full-time or part-time work. That's a good thing, considering an increased demand for therapists has created new opportunities for today's job seekers.

But what makes a good therapist?

"Friendliness, flexibility, a willingness to learn and creativity," says Paula Dorschied, occupational therapist at Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford, Conn. "I think a lot of the time, with some patients, you need to be able to expand the family's goals and understand what they want and figure out how to achieve those goals. You need creativity to do this."

Aileen Martinez, senior therapist in the physical therapy department at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami, agrees.

"Sometimes there are a thousand ways you can tackle one issue or one problem, and it's always going to be different." Martinez says. "One patient may not respond as well to something as would another, so you have to change your approach."

Here's a quick look at careers in physical, recreational and occupational therapy:

## Physical Therapists

**Training:** A master's degree in physical therapy and successful completion of a licensure exam, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

**Responsibilities:** Physical therapists help restore function and mobility, relieve pain, and prevent or limit permanent physical disabilities.

"You have a wide variety of people who need physical therapy," says Jennifer Hunt, associate director of public relations for the American Physical Therapy Association in Alexandria, Va. "For example, a therapist could help someone re-learn how to use certain parts of their body after an accident."

Physical therapists practice in a variety of settings, including hospitals, schools, businesses and private homes.

**Outlook:** Opportunities for physical therapists should increase 21 to 35 percent by 2010, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

"We experienced an evening out of supply and demand several years ago," Hunt says. "But the demand is increasing and the job outlook is looking better."

## **Recreational Therapists**

**Training:** A four-year degree in therapeutic recreation, a clinical internship and national certification, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

**Responsibilities:** Recreational therapists offer treatment services and recreation activities to individuals with disabilities, illnesses or other disabling conditions.

"Therapists work with all different kinds of clients," says Ann D. Huston, executive director of the American Therapeutic Recreation Association in Alexandria, Va. "For example, they could work with someone who had a stroke and needs to learn how to walk again."

**Outlook:** Opportunities for occupational therapists should increase 3 to 9 percent by 2010, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

Huston says there is a heavy demand for recreational therapists in educational programs."

"We have vacancies all over the country that we're not able to fill because we just don't have enough therapists to go around," Huston says.

## **Occupational Therapists**

**Training:** Therapists must earn a bachelor's degree in occupational therapy. Registered occupational therapists must pass a national certification examination, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

**Responsibilities:** Occupational therapists help people improve their ability to perform tasks in their daily living and working environments.

"You can start with a tiny baby who doesn't have the development needed in the mouth muscles to eat," says Brynda Pappas, public affairs manager for the American Occupational Therapy Association in Bethesda, Md. "There are special occupational therapists who work in the neonatal intensive care unit."

**Outlook:** Opportunities for occupational therapists should increase 21 to 35 percent by 2010, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

"The field is growing a lot because the population is aging and older people have a need for these services," Pappas says. "And a lot of children are born with serious developmental disabilities."

**Salary stats:**

Average wage for therapists

**In Chicago:**

Physical..... \$65,700/year  
\$31.59/hour

Recreational.....\$24,440/year  
\$11.75/hour

Occupational..... \$41,120/year  
\$19.77/hour

**In the United States:**

Physical..... \$57,450/year  
\$27.62/hour

Recreational..... \$29,590/year  
\$14.23/hour

Occupational..... \$50,140/year  
\$24.10/hour

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