

Occupational Therapy Assistant

Under the supervision of and in collaboration with an occupational therapist, the occupational therapy assistant provides services to clients focusing on participation in selected activities to restore, reinforce, and enhance performance; facilitate learning of those skills and functions essential for adaptation and participation; diminish or correct pathology; and promote and maintain health and wellness. A fundamental concern is the development and maintenance of the skill and capacity throughout the lifespan to perform with satisfaction to self and others meaningful activities and roles essential to social participation and to the mastery of self and the environment. Under the supervision of and in partnership with the occupational therapist, the occupational therapy assistant participates in the development of adaptive skills and performance capacity and is concerned with factors that promote, influence, or enhance performance, as well as those that serve as barriers or impediments to the individual's occupational performance. The occupational therapy assistant provides service to those clients whose abilities to perform meaningful activities of living are threatened or impaired by:

- Developmental deficits
- The aging process
- Poverty and cultural differences
- Physical injury or illness
- Psychological or social disability

Career Description

A contemporary entry-level occupational therapy assistant must:

- Have acquired an educational foundation in the liberal arts and sciences, including a focus on issues related to diversity
- Be educated as a generalist, with a broad exposure to the delivery models and systems utilized in settings where occupational therapy is currently practiced and where it is emerging as a service
- Have achieved entry-level competence through a combination of academic and fieldwork education
- Be prepared to work under the supervision of and in cooperation with the occupational therapist
- Be prepared to articulate and apply occupational therapy principles, intervention approaches and rationales, and expected outcomes as these relate to occupational performance of the client
- Be prepared to be a lifelong learner and keep current with best practice
- Uphold the ethical standards, values, and attitudes of the occupational therapy profession

Employment Characteristics

Occupational therapy assistants assist in the planning and implementation of treatment of a diverse population in a variety of settings, such as nursing homes, hospitals and clinics, rehabilitation facilities, long-term care facilities, extended care facilities, sheltered workshops, schools and camps, private homes, and community agencies.

Salary

The results of the 2010 AOTA Workforce Study show that the median annual salary for full-time occupational therapy assistants was \$44,000, with median salaries in the 90th percentile at \$63,000 and at \$27,429 in the 10th percentile. The median hourly wage for occupational therapist assistants working a standard part-time schedule was \$22.60.

Compensation varied, the study noted, "according to total years in the profession, region of the country and location type (urban, suburban, or rural), highest degree held within the profession, primary work setting, AOTA membership status, and more."

Data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (available at www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes312011.htm) indicate that median annual wages of occupational therapist assistants were \$50,250 in May 2009. The middle 50 percent earned between \$41,200 and \$59,890. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$33,350, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$68,450. Median annual wages in the industries employing the largest numbers of occupational therapist assistants in May 2009 (from the largest to smallest) were:

- Home health care services \$60,980
- Nursing care facilities \$54,030
- Offices of other health practitioners \$53,430
- General medical and surgical hospitals \$46,240
- Elementary and secondary schools \$44,430

For more information, refer to www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.

Educational Programs

Length. Education may be acquired in either a two-year associate degree program or a one- to two-year certificate program. Effective July 1, 2013, however, occupational therapy assistant education will no longer be offered at the certificate level. These technical-level education programs are located in two-year and four-year colleges and universities, and postsecondary vocational/technical schools and institutions, and include academic and fieldwork components, as do the professional-level programs.

Prerequisites. High school diploma or equivalent. A foundation of liberal arts and biological, physical, social, and behavioral sciences may be prerequisite to, or concurrent with, the technical education of the program curriculum.

Curriculum. Curricula of accredited occupational therapy assistant programs are required to include:

- A broad foundation of the liberal arts and sciences
- Basic tenets of occupational therapy
- The process of screening and evaluation
- The process of intervention and implementation
- Context of service delivery
- Assistance in the management of occupational therapy services
- Use of professional literature
- Professional ethics, values, and responsibilities

In addition, sixteen weeks of full-time fieldwork education is required.

Licensure, Registration, Certification

All states, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the District of Columbia regulate the practice of occupational therapy. To obtain a license, applicants must graduate from an accredited occupational therapy assistant educational program and pass a national certification examination for occupational therapy assistants. Those who pass the exam are awarded the title “Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA).” Some states have additional requirements for therapists who work in schools or early intervention programs. These requirements may include education-related classes, an education practice certificate, or early intervention certification requirements.

Inquiries

Careers Education

American Occupational Therapy Association
4720 Montgomery Lane
PO Box 31220
Bethesda, MD 20824-1220
(301) 652-2682
www.aota.org

Certification

National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT)
12 South Summit Avenue, Suite 100
Gaithersburg, MD 20877-4150
(301) 990-7979
www.nbcot.org

Program Accreditation

Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education
4720 Montgomery Lane, PO Box 31220
Bethesda, MD 20824-1220
(301) 652-2682 x2914
www.acoteonline.org

Note: Adapted in part from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Occupational Therapist Assistants and Aides, at www.bls.gov/oco/ocos166.htm.