

Occupational Therapy's critical role in the Future of Healthcare



What is Occupational Therapy?

Occupational therapists work to help patients return to life and work through the therapeutic use of everyday activities (occupations). They are focused on treating a multitude of patient populations, from children, to adults and the elderly, treating conditions such as hand and upper extremity injuries, fine motor control issues, eating and grasping difficulty, and developmental delay issues.

Examples of occupational therapy in practice include children with disabilities so they may participate in school and social life, helping those recovering from injury to regain everyday skills, and providing support for aging adults who may be experiencing physical and cognitive challenges.

Benefits Associated with Occupational Therapy

- Reduced Readmission Rates
 - Occupational therapy is the only health care spending category with a statistically significant relationship to lower 30-day readmission rates for three primary health care conditions: heart failure, pneumonia, and acute myocardial infarction (Rogers, Bai, Lavin, & Anderson, 2016).
- Improved Quality of Life for Older Adults
 - Two different studies support occupational therapy as effective in reducing pain and improving social functioning, mental health functioning, life satisfaction, and depressive symptoms for older adults (Clark et al, 1997, 2012), also leading to health care costs savings (Hay et al., 2002).
 - Occupational therapy can lead to a reduced rate and risk of falls in older adults (Gillespie et al., 2012; Haines et al., 2004). Falls are the leading cause of injury death for older adults, costing an estimated \$34 billion in 2013 in direct medical costs (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015).
- Reduced Expenses Related to Chronic Pain and Faster Return to Work
 - Chronic pain is responsible for more than \$100 billion annually in health care, disability, and related expenses. Occupational therapy can improve a person's ability to manage physical and psychological pain, leading to better quality of life. Research has demonstrated significant costs savings, improved function, increased return-to-work rates, reduced disability claims, and decreased dependence on prescription medications (Gatchel & Okifuji, 2006).
- Reduced Costs Associated with Intensive Care Patients
 - Integration of occupational therapy for patients in the intensive care unit, with the goal of increasing mobility for discharge, has shown to reduce length of stay. One research study showed a decrease in hospital length of stay from 13 days to just 4 days, with an estimated savings of \$2,500 per patient per day (Hotchkin, Riddick, Gaston & Jacobs, 2015).
- Enhanced Value to Primary Care
 - Integration of occupational therapy into the primary care team is shown to provide significant cost savings, due to their background in addressing physical and behavioral health, rehabilitation, and habilitation. Their involvement in the primary care team can improve issues that affect daily function and quality of life, thus reducing associated health care costs (Dahl-Popolizio, Manson, Muir & Rogers, 2016).

2023 FOTA Legislative Priorities

In 2022, the Florida Legislature unanimously passed, and Governor DeSantis signed into law, SB 632, which modernized the scope of practice for occupational therapy in Florida. This was a critical step, in not only recognizing in state statute the full breadth of services occupational therapists can provide, but ensuring patients have access to vital occupational therapy services.

Entering the 2023 Legislative Session, FOTA remains committed to efforts to continue promoting the profession and support patient access to occupational therapy services.

Licensure Compact

In 2022, the American Occupational Therapy Association, joined by the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy, embarked on state legislation to create an occupational therapy licensure compact. To date, 20 states have passed legislation enacting the compact.

Florida has not yet joined the compact, however FOTA is interested in starting the conversation to pursue a compact in future Legislative Sessions.

- An interstate licensing compact would allow OTs and OTAs to practice across state lines via a “compact privilege” which is equivalent to a license
- A compact enhances the mobility of occupational therapy practitioners, which is particularly important for spouses of relocating military families
- Patient access to occupational therapy and continuity of care is improved, as state lines no longer become a boundary for accessing qualified practitioners
- States become more informed from the exchange of licensure, enhancing access to investigatory and disciplinary information between member states

Medicaid Reimbursement

- Medicaid reimbursement levels for occupational therapists in Florida are amongst the lowest in the country, despite the fact that occupational therapists are a key factor in reducing health care costs, improving quality of life, and helping people return to work.
- Occupational therapy has been shown to have a statistically significant relationship to lower 30-day readmission rates for primary health conditions such as heart failure and pneumonia, as well as reduce hospital length of stay for intensive care patients, resulting in cost savings for the health care system.

Support increased reimbursement rates for Medicaid providers and specifically occupational therapists.

Access to Mental Health Services

- Occupational therapists have specialized knowledge/skills in mental health and are educated to select and use evaluation and interventions to promote mental health, but also improve physical, sensory, interpersonal, and cognitive function. Florida passed legislation in 2022 to update the OT practice act and recognize OTs role in mental health.
- Occupational therapists are recognized at the federal level as mental health providers and while they cannot diagnose, they work with those to create treatment plans and provide appropriate and valuable treatment. OTs provide mental health services in a diverse range of settings, including community-based home health care, hospitals, schools, nursing facilities, and private practice.

Support efforts to expand access to mental health services throughout Florida, including utilizing occupational therapy as a resource for the treatment and prevention of mental health disorders.