



What you need to know about
Occupational Therapy



Swedish Association of
Occupational Therapists

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Photo: Colourbox

Printed by: Trydells

www.fsa.se

ISBN: 978-91-87837-11-1

Not everyone knows what Occupational Therapy is and what occupational therapists do. We hope this publication will change this, and that you, after reading the following pages, will have greater knowledge about the profession and contributions occupational therapists can make.

But let's begin by telling you about Svea.

About Svea

Svea had recently had her ninetieth birthday, which, of course, was very important to her, to her mind entitling her to have her bathroom renovated. She had difficulties getting into and out of her bath so on a summer day she phoned me. As her occupational therapist I explained how adjustments to her bathroom could be made, how these could be financed, and my role as an occupational therapist. We decided that I should come to her home to discuss matters further. As Svea hadn't been in contact with the occupational therapists working in local healthcare before I thought it would be a good opportunity to gain professional insight into her daily life.

During my visit Svea showed me around her apartment – she was happy to be able to manage to do her day-to-day activities so well, despite her considerable age. We sat down and went on to talk about her need to feel safer when taking a shower. Our conversation proved to be a lengthy one, about

her life and current situation. She told me that she spent most of her time at home, waiting for her children or grandchildren to come and see her. She felt increasingly tired and didn't dare to go to the local shop, so other people had to go shopping for her. At her age, Svea no longer felt able to cook nor bake. That was at the heart of the matter – she'd been quite renowned for her Sunday dinners and nut-cakes.

That summer assistive devices were fitted in Svea's bathroom. Later on the bathtub was taken out and replaced by a shower which was in line with the renovation of her rental apartment that had already been planned. But I'm fairly sure that Svea rather remembers our walks to the local shop, part of my strategy of finding ways for her to be able to do her own shopping. Svea probably also remembers that we planned cooking simple dishes that she could manage to make by herself. And her grandchildren will probably never forget how, one day, she surprised them with a home-made nut-cake.



What is Occupational Therapy?

Each and every person needs to feel that he/she has a meaningful life. We all need to have a feeling of participation in our daily lives and have a place to fill in society. Occupational therapists focus on making it possible for people to achieve this – managing to carry out activities in their day-to-day activities. People who, because of injury, illness or impaired function, cannot manage things like personal care, living at home, school, work or do not have acceptable leisure time activities can get support from occupational therapists.

The goal of occupational therapy is that people, starting with their current resources, are enabled to be as independent as possible when carrying out the day-to-day activities that they need and want to do.

In other words – occupational therapy makes daily living work.

Does occupational therapy do any good?

Research shows that occupational therapy contributes towards maintaining or improving people's abilities to carry out everyday activities.

Occupational therapy reduces dependence on healthcare and hospital resources as well as lowering the need for support provided by social services. Input needed from people's next of kin and other relatives also becomes lower.

In addition, occupational therapy interventions often contribute towards lowering costs for local and regional governments. Lower costs for nursing, healthcare and sick leave make it even more important to invest in occupational therapy.

What occupational therapy means for individuals in the form of quality of life, independence and freedom cannot be overestimated nor measured in financial terms.





When is occupational therapy needed?

Occupational therapy links disability to the possibility of active daily life. In the occurrence of accident or illness occupational therapy increases the possibility of returning to work or school as well as having a daily life as similar as possible to previously. Occupational therapy interventions can also be preventive.

When it comes to children born with disabilities, occupational therapy enables development of physical, cognitive and social skills.

Occupational therapy can also relieve difficulties that are sometimes linked to ageing. Best use can be made of earlier skills and interests and individuals can be encouraged to train previous skills that are experienced as being meaningful. New ways of tackling daily living may also need developing.

The sooner occupational therapy is introduced into a person's rehabilitation process the quicker he/she may be able to regain active life.

What do occupational therapists do?

What occupational therapists do for individuals differs depending on the person's circumstances and needs. An occupational therapist takes a holistic view, looking at activities that the individual wants to and needs to be able to carry out. This may mean making best use of physical, cognitive and social skills, as well as developing them, or adapting environments – at home, work or school. One part of this may be trying out, adapting and placing orders for various assistive devices.

Occupational therapists work with an individual on his/her own and/or in a group. Work often takes place in a team together with professional colleagues such as physiotherapists, psychologists, nurses, speech therapists, dieticians and doctors.

Another role for occupational therapists is supervising and supporting healthcare staff as well as next of kin or other relatives involved in caring for individuals.

Writing certifications as the basis for decisions to be made by authorities is an integral part of occupational therapists' duties.





Where do occupational therapists work?

- In municipalities (care of the elderly and persons with various kinds of disability)
- In hospitals (somatic and psychiatric care and rehabilitation)
- In healthcare centres
- For employment agencies and other similar organizations
- At schools and junior colleges
- For social insurance offices
- For corporations working with technical aids/assistive devices
- At centres that provide assistive devices
- With habilitation (children, youths and adults)
- At colleges and universities
- In sight-care clinics
- In self employment/ private companies

More occupational therapists are needed!

The Swedish Association of Occupational Therapists (FSA) estimates that the long-term demand for occupational therapists in Sweden will increase faster than the education and training provided at educational establishments.

In Sweden some 400 occupational therapists graduate annually. There are about 11.000 licensed occupational therapists currently practising their profession.

Currently there is a lack of occupational therapists in some locations in the country but in the towns in which education and training takes place there are, to a certain extent, surpluses.

Society's ever-increasing insight about the advantages of favourable rehabilitation as well as preventive and health-promoting measures, are expected to increase the need for occupational therapists in the years ahead.



How to become an occupational therapist

Becoming an occupational therapist means studying for three years at a university or university college.

Courses are available at eight institutions of higher education in Sweden: the School of Health Sciences (University of Jönköping) the Karolinska Institute (Stockholm) the University of Linköping (Norrköping Campus) the Luleå University of Technology, Lund University, the University of Gothenburg, Umeå University and Örebro University.

The courses include both practical training and theoretical studies in the fields of Occupational Therapy, Medicine, Social Science and Behavioural Science. Studies concern understanding people's capabilities for activities in various environments and how these are linked with health and participation.

Completion of the three-year course

entitles one to apply for a licence to practise Occupational Therapy, issued by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, but it is also possible to continue studying for a Master's Degree and at research level. Only after being granted a licence can one begin to practise professionally.

Do you need to see an occupational therapist?

You don't need a doctor's referral to see an occupational therapist. Contact your healthcare centre, local healthcare authority, municipality or regional healthcare advisory service. If in Sweden call 1177 or go to www.1177.se.

One example of finding information in English on the Internet is www.1177.se/Stockholm/Other-languages/Engelska. Similar information is available in several languages.



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