

WHAT, WHY, WHERE, AND WHO IS AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST?

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WHAT is an Occupational Therapist? One might reply rather flippantly that an Occupational Therapist is that new medical specialist who takes the joy out of invalidism or the pain out of being an invalid, depending upon the state of mind of that particular patient. For we all subconsciously have a tendency to become invalids at some time or other during every severe illness.

A more dignified definition might be that an Occupational Therapist is the medical specialist who carries us over the dangerous period between **acute illness** and our return to the world of men and affairs as a useful member of society.

WHY is an Occupational Therapist? Because for generations past we have been building an enormous army of people whose wounds have been healed and whose bodily infections have been overcome, but who are not restored to their normal place in society. Lame in body and lame in mind,

they have been left by thousands to shift for themselves as more or less permanent misfits, semi-invalids, invalids and dependents. By thousands they have become mental and nervous cases because we failed to see that healing the wound or succeeding in our fight against the germ was only part of a doctor's job.

As the size and seriousness of this problem dawned upon the medical profession it became quite evident to the doctor that he, unaided, could make only imperceptible headway in preventing the increase of this army of mental and physical invalids. Then sprang up a new and highly trained specialist to assist the doctor. This specialist was given the name "Occupational Therapist". She became one of the most important members of the health team, for today no doctor can successfully practice as an individualist. To aid him he has the nurse, the laboratory technician, the X-ray technician, the dietitian, the physiotherapist, the dentist, and

now, no less important than the other members of the health team, the occupational therapist.

The duties of this new medical specialist, the Occupational Therapist, begin at the earliest possible moment before enforced idleness has started to do damage to the mind and to the body of the ill person. It is to her that the doctor gives detailed instructions as to what use is to be made of the resources of the patient's mind and body which are still available during the illness.

WHERE is the Occupational Therapist? As a psychiatrist, I point with considerable pride to the fact that it was in work with mental and nervous patients that the Occupational Therapist first made her official bow to the medical profession and to the public. Now, in every mental and nervous hospital worthy of the name; in every orthopedic hospital worthy of the name; and in fact in our leading general and other specialty hospitals we find the Occupational Therapist. Her activities have gone even further than hospital practice. We find the Occupational Therapist associated in private office practice.

In the field of mental and nervous diseases, the Occupational Therapist fully as much as any other indi-

vidual has made it possible to do away with the use of hypnotic and sedative drugs, to do away with mechanical restraint and seclusion. Indeed, without her aid, our present-day progress and methods could not be effected.

Will you pardon me for referring in illustration to the hospital with which I have the honor of being connected? The program of occupational therapy includes not only making rugs and baskets, arts and crafts and modelling, but instruction in music, the fine arts generally, nature study, horticulture, domestic science, home economics, home nursing and other occupations which may be directly related to the problems which will confront our guests upon their return to their usual position in society. It includes golf, tennis, outdoor sports generally, gymnasium work, pool, bowling, etc., which tend not only to restore both body and mind to normal but give an introduction to a permanent, healthful hobby for the future. These are the modern substitutes for powders and pills, restraint and force.

It is the practice in the better institutions, be it surgical, medical, mental or nervous, to, as early as possible, start purposeful occupational work to combat the invalid tendencies before these invalid tendencies get a start. The natural

tendency in us all is to become an invalid when confronted with a serious physical or mental incapacitation.

WHO is the Occupational Therapist? She is a highly trained specialist, a student of human nature, trained in the psychology of the ill—a woman possessed of infinite tact, patience, and desire for service, a teacher with broad training in many occupations, herself possessed of a good mind; with a cultural background, and above all, a person with the professional mind.

In spite of the tremendous progress which has been made, we now realize that we are still only skimming along the surface.

The Occupational Therapist is limited only by her own ability. The profession of occupational therapy is limited merely by the resources in brains and imagina-

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tion available to it. I know of no equal professional opportunity open for young women. I know of no profession which, during the present generation, will offer more individual satisfaction to the person embracing it. It is one profession not overcrowded.

WHAT is the Occupational Therapist? She is the person who stands between acute illness and invalidism.

WHY is the Occupational Therapist? Because for generations we were accumulating an army of people with unnecessary mental and physical handicaps.

WHERE is the Occupational Therapist? Wherever there are doctors there should be Occupational Therapists.

WHO is the Occupational Therapist? A highly trained medical assistant possessed of imagination, ability and a cultural background.

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