

Occupational Therapy's Role in Mental Health Recovery

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA), recovery is defined as “a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential” (SAMHSA, 2012).

The recovery model requires a shared decision-making process that is person centered and client driven. The client-provider partnership supports shared decision making from the time the individual first engages in services, through developing intervention plans, and in all other aspects of the therapeutic process. A primary goal of the recovery model is to facilitate resiliency, health, and wellness in the community of the individual's choice, rather than to manage symptoms. SAMHSA (2012) identified 10 guiding principles of recovery: (1) hope, (2) person-driven, (3) many pathways, (4) holistic, (5) peer support, (6) relational, (7) culture, (8) addresses trauma, (9) strengths/responsibility, and (10) respect. These fundamental recovery principles are in full alignment with the philosophy of occupational therapy practice, which is inherently client centered, collaborative, and focused on supporting resiliency, full participation, health promotion, and a wellness lifestyle.

Occupational therapy practitioners work collaboratively with people in a manner that helps to foster hope, motivation, and empowerment, as well as system change. Educated in the scientific understanding of neurophysiology, psychosocial development, activity and environmental analysis, and group dynamics, occupational therapy practitioners work to empower each individual to fully participate and be successful and satisfied in his or her self-selected occupations. Occupational therapy practitioners assume a variety of roles such as direct care therapists, consultants, academic educators, managers, and administrators. They may also work in state and national mental health organizations to help assist in local, state, and national transformation efforts.

The following are examples of how the knowledge and skill base of occupational therapy is used in the process of assisting individuals in all phases of mental health recovery:

- Teach and support the active use of coping strategies to help manage the effect of symptoms of illness on one's life, including being more organized and able to engage in activities of choice
- Help to identify and implement healthy habits, rituals, and routines to support a wellness lifestyle by addressing barriers and building on existing abilities
- Support the identification of personal values, needs, and goals to enable informed, realistic decision making, such as when considering housing and employment options
- Support the creation and use of a wellness recovery action plan in group or individual sessions
- Provide information to increase awareness of community-based resources, such as peer-facilitated groups and other support options
- Provide information on how to monitor physical health concerns (e.g., diabetes management, smoking cessation), develop strategies to control chronic symptoms, and recognize and respond to acute changes in mental health status
- Support the ability to engage in long-term planning (e.g., budget for major purchases, prepare advanced medical and mental health directives) that leads to meeting personal recovery goals



Occupational therapy practitioners are also teaming with individuals, families and caregivers, interdisciplinary professionals, and other mental health stakeholders, including behavioral health organizations, payers, and communities, to help transform the culture of mental health care through the promotion and active implementation of recovery-based principles and practices. Together, these teams are designing innovative agency and community-based supportive programming based on these recovery principles. The “Recovery to Practice” federal initiative “helps behavioral health and general health care practitioners improve delivery of recovery-oriented services, supports, and treatment” (SAMHSA, 2015).

Where Are Occupational Therapy Mental Health Recovery Services Provided?



Occupational therapy practitioners provide mental health services in the following settings:

- acute and long-term-care facilities
- private and public hospitals
- forensic and juvenile justice centers
- residential and day programs
- skilled nursing facilities
- community-based mental health centers
- school
- military installations
- employment programs
- private practice
- outpatient clinics

Conclusion

The practice of occupational therapy, like the recovery model, is based on the philosophy and evidence that individuals diagnosed with mental health conditions can and do recover and lead meaningful, satisfying, and productive lives. It is the profession’s emphasis on a holistic approach to function, participation, and partnership that is used to help support people with mental illness to develop skills, engage in activities of interest, and meet individual recovery goals.

References

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2012). *SAMHSA's working definition of recovery*. Retrieved from <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//PEP12-RECDEF/PEP12-RECDEF.pdf>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2015). *Recovery to practice*. Retrieved from <http://www.samhsa.gov/recovery-to-practice>

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O C C U P A T I O N A L T H E R A P Y

Occupational therapy enables people of all ages live life to its fullest by helping them to promote health, make lifestyle or environmental changes, and prevent—or live better with—injury, illness, or disability. By looking at the whole picture—a client’s psychological, physical, emotional, and social make-up—occupational therapy assists people to achieve their goals, function at the highest possible level, maintain or rebuild their independence, and participate in the everyday activities of life.

