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Occupational Therapist in Pain Management

This page explains what an Occupational Therapist is, and how they can assist people who live with long-term pain (also known as 'chronic' or persistent pain).

What is an Occupational Therapist?

Occupational Therapists are health and social care professionals who help people of all ages carry out activities they need or want to do, but are prevented from doing as a result of physical or mental illness, disability, or the effects of aging. Activities can include everyday tasks, such as getting dressed, preparing a meal, going to work, or simply continuing with a favourite hobby.

Occupational Therapists work with individuals to help them find alternative ways to carry on with activities to enable them to live life to the fullest by maximising independence and safety.

What is the role of an Occupational Therapist (OT) in a Pain Service?

An Advanced Practitioner OT working in Pain Management has a special interest in this field and has undertaken further training. They keep up to date with all new developments in Pain Management and are members of related special interest groups.

Living with chronic pain can affect all aspects of a person's life - how they move, think, sleep, feel, and carry out everyday activities. It is a very personal experience, and how a person experiences pain affects how they deal with it and the impact it has on them. If pain stops a person from doing the things they want to, or need to do, then this will probably leave them feeling frustrated and low in mood, which unfortunately can exacerbate pain.

Occupational Therapists work with people who have chronic pain to help them understand their condition and to develop more effective ways of coping with and managing their pain.

How can seeing an Occupational Therapist help with chronic pain?

An Occupational Therapist uses their professional expertise in understanding how the body works when doing everyday activities and tasks.

Following a detailed assessment, your Occupational Therapist can apply problem-solving techniques to help you to manage your pain better and break the cycle of ongoing thoughts about it, so that you can continue with activities that you enjoy and need to do.

Seeing an Occupational Therapist can also help people accept and adjust to their pain as best they can.

Occupational Therapists can help people carry out activities, despite experiencing pain by:

- Advising on various strategies to help with pain management, such as pacing, planning and prioritising activities

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- Providing or suggesting assistive equipment if needed, to promote independence and safety when carrying out various tasks
- Suggesting techniques to help with energy conservation, muscle and joint protection, relaxation, sleep and keeping active

What does seeing an Occupational Therapist involve?

When you are referred to an Occupational Therapist, you will be offered an assessment appointment, either for an individual assessment over the phone, or for a home visit assessment (if necessary). Appointments can take up to an hour.

Your appointment will involve discussing your pain and its impact on your overall well-being. If you require a home visit, the OT will observe how you move, transfer and carry out functional everyday tasks. At the end of the assessment, the OT will discuss the options available and together you will decide the next steps to take.

This could include:

- Further individual sessions addressing the issues discussed in the assessment
- Referral on to other professionals in the Pain Management Team
- Referral to other services outside of the Pain Management Service
- Provision of assistive equipment, or no further action.

The Occupational Therapist in the Pain team does not offer physical treatments or medication. Their focus is on helping you develop strategies for adapting to and with your pain. It is not about finding a cure.

You are more than welcome to have someone you know with you at any home visit arranged.

Confidentiality and information sharing

Occupational Therapists will share only the information which is relevant to your care with other members of the Pain Management Service. They will keep all other information confidential (private). Any reports or letters that are sent out will be with your consent and you will also receive a copy.

Pain Management Occupational Therapy Staff: Clarissa Gregory

If you would like to know more about Occupational Therapy and Pain Management:

You can find out more information on the COT website, at www.COT.org.uk and the British Pain Society, at: www.britishpainsociety.org

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