**OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY**

**What is Occupational Therapy?**

Occupational Therapy is a health profession which helps people to independently engage in occupations of meaning to them, maintain their interests and adapt to changes in their abilities as they may occur.

Some physical or mental health conditions will have impact on a person’s day to day activities within their family life, work and leisure. Occupational Therapy seeks to reduce this impact and regards occupations as all activities that people engage in during every day life.

**What can Occupational Therapy offer?**

For many people with Parkinson’s, simple tasks and daily activities that could previously be done with ease and without any great thought can become slower and more difficult to do. Occupational Therapists have a role to play in helping people work through these difficulties to carry out such tasks effectively.

Occupational Therapists can assist people with Parkinson’s to learn new techniques to enable them to continue with every day tasks such as grooming, dressing and meal preparation. Other occupations that Occupational Therapists can address are those based around the home, community or workplace. This can include activities such as handwriting, managing paperwork, using the telephone, gardening, managing work duties and organising familiar routines. Essentially the focus is on enabling the individual to maintain involvement in activities that are important to them.

In addition, Occupational Therapists can encourage ways to increase being active within the home environment or to access buildings and activities in the community.

**What happens when someone is referred to an Occupational Therapist?**

During the first meeting, an Occupational Therapist will engage with the person to gather information about their home circumstances, family roles, responsibilities and the types of day-to-day occupations that they need and want to do. The person with Parkinson’s may agree to also include discussion with family/whanau or friends. The Occupational Therapist may ask if they can observe the performance of difficult actions and consider the impact of other health issues if Parkinson’s is not the only problem.

The Occupational Therapist will assess and identify the person’s main priorities for improvements and find out what is preventing them from carrying out their daily routines and usual lifestyle. Next, an individually tailored action plan will be devised, including goals to be addressed over a course of one or more sessions. This will be done in partnership with the person with Parkinson’s.

**The main ways an Occupational Therapist can help**

**Solving problems** – working together to find easier ways of doing particular tasks. Sometimes, an Occupational Therapist may advise on a different method that can be used. Advice about using gadgets, equipment, housing modifications and new technologies may be given where suitable. Suggestions may sometimes be made about practical changes, such as re-organising the furniture at home to allow easier movement around an awkward area. In other situations, an Occupational Therapist may advise about using a suitable service within your current contacts, in the community, or other forms of support.
Providing information and support - Occupational Therapists can help people with Parkinson’s make informed choices, by providing information and explaining the various resources, services and benefits that are available to help maintain family life, work and leisure interests. Advice can be given about issues such as driving and accessing other forms of transport, or how to get practical assistance to allow someone to continue to meet work or family commitments.

Occupational Therapists can also advise on coping strategies to help with Parkinson’s symptoms such as fatigue, handwriting changes, and communication difficulties. Depending on the nature and length of the programme, treatment may take place in a clinic, hospital ward, residential care centre or at the client’s home, school or workplace.

To become an Occupational Therapist takes a minimum of three years tertiary level training. The degree work covers occupational science, neurology, anatomy, physiology and a range of physical and mental health conditions. Occupational Therapy students learn about different treatment methods to empower people within their everyday activities.

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