Pursuing a Career in Occupational Therapy: Perspectives of Occupational Therapy Students

In honor of Occupational Therapy Month, we asked three of our occupational therapy colleagues (past and present) to share their recent experiences entering into the field.

Rose Reitman gained an interest in occupational therapy while working as a therapy aide at Penn Therapy & Fitness University City. She is set to attend Saint Augustine University in fall 2019 to pursue her degree in occupational therapy, with the goal of working with military personnel recovering from traumatic brain injuries and amputations. Prior to joining Penn Therapy & Fitness University City, Rose completed four internships in a variety of rehabilitation settings and graduated from Immaculata University with a degree in Exercise Science.

How would you describe an occupational therapist?
An occupational therapist is someone who cares about an individual’s entire well-being, not just their injury, and works to rehabilitate the patient to meet their specific goals.

What inspired you to become an occupational therapist?

I experienced occupational therapy first hand after receiving therapy for a traumatic brain injury, which made me decide to go to school to become an occupational therapist.

How did your role as a therapy aide help prepare you to go back to school to become an occupational therapist?

Working at Penn Therapy & Fitness University City gave me the most rewarding experience and preparation for my future as an occupational therapist. Each therapist took the time to teach me something new about the field. I learned something different every day, from basic fundamentals of patient care to therapy interventions and tools.

Working at Penn Therapy & Fitness University City as a patient service representative from November 2015 to May 2018, Sara Cote has grown into her career as an occupational therapist through the influence of her colleagues. She is currently pursuing her occupational therapy degree at Salas University.

What inspired you to become an occupational therapist?

I was interested in psychology and anatomy, so it was important to me to find a career that could combine these two interests. I also love the flexibility; occupational therapy touches so many different populations and in a wide variety of settings.

How did your experience as a patient service representative help prepare you to become an occupational therapist?
Working at Penn Therapy & Fitness University City was so helpful in preparing me for school. I was surrounded by amazing occupational therapists who inspired me to work as hard as possible to get into school. My colleagues were so supportive, constantly answered my questions and let me observe many of their sessions. They gave me a lot of advice that I carry with me today. Additionally, I had the opportunity to interact with patients on a daily basis, which improved my ability to form rapport.

What would you share with others who are interested in going to school to become an occupational therapist?

Forming good study habits as an undergraduate student definitely helped prepare me for graduate school, along with observation hours. It gave me a holistic view of the profession. This seems obvious, but it is such a broad field that it can be hard to describe. Advocacy is very important to the field, and knowing how to define the profession is the first step.

Joining the hand therapy team at Penn Therapy & Fitness University City in February 2018, Jennifer Hock, OT, continues to grow as a clinician while mentoring students and new therapists.

What inspired you to become an occupational therapist?

I learned about occupational therapy while my grandmother was in short-term rehabilitation. When visiting her, she couldn’t stop talking about how much she liked her occupational therapist because they were helping her to be independent. I loved that it is a career that helps people work towards leading the most meaningful and productive lives they can.

What would you share with others who are interested in going to school to become an occupational therapist?

I strongly recommend that all potential occupational therapists shadow and observe a variety occupational therapy settings. It allows you to really gain an understanding of what an occupational therapist does and to expose yourself to how varied the field can be.
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