



Occupational Therapy Department:
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Occupational Therapy and Veteran Care

Occupational Therapy Department at Perley Rideau

October is Occupational Therapy month! Every year at this time, we find ourselves reflecting on our diverse profession – its roots and future directions. Since its origin in the early 1900s, there have been strong connections between Occupational Therapy and Veteran care, which has continued to the present day at the Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre.



Occupational Therapy has always involved a holistic approach to care; addressing physical, cognitive, emotional and spiritual components of a person, and important considerations of a specific environment, in order to maximize an individual's ability to achieve their goals. During World War I, it was determined that wounded soldiers benefitted from meaningful activities in order to help them regain the ability to return to their daily roles. It was at this time (1918-1919) that the University of Toronto established a course to train "suitable young women" as occupational aides, where they would provide bedside therapy in military hospitals. An article published in 1921 describes the positive impact of Occupational Therapy for World War I soldiers in a Veterans' hospital. This article shows Veterans occupied with weaving rugs, beading purses and knitting sweaters and states that Occupational Therapists, "go on the theory that no matter how many splints or bandages a patient is buried under there is some form of craft that will occupy his spare moments."



The profession of Occupational Therapy continued to evolve as World War II approached, and working with soldiers and Veterans remained a prominent role for Occupational Therapists. During World War II, Occupational Therapists addressed the physical and psychological conditions of returning soldiers. The military noticed the positive impact that Occupational Therapy had with wounded soldiers and changed their policies in 1943 to allow Occupational Therapists to work on the front lines in the Nursing Corps of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps.



Occupational Therapy Department

While there is currently less emphasis on arts and crafts, Occupational Therapists continue to work with Veterans in many ways. Possible Occupational Therapy interventions include: supporting a new way of living for those with mental health issues such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); training on equipment and strategies to adapt to physical injuries such as amputations, traumatic brain injuries and chronic pain; and providing vocation retraining to facilitate the transition back to civilian life.

The Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre is home to over 200 Veteran residents from World War II and the Korean War, as well as modern Veterans. The Perley stands out as a home with exceptional Veteran care and has always been ahead of the curve with Occupational Therapists and Occupational Therapy Assistants on staff as part of the interdisciplinary care team. The Occupational Therapy department works with Veterans and community long term care residents to support with goals such as independent mobility, seating/positioning, reducing risk for falls, and pressure injury management. In addition to working with long-term care residents, Occupational Therapy is also instrumental in the success of the short stay programs within the Perley, including the SAFE (Sub-Acute for Frail Elderly) program, the Convalescent Care program and SBSU (Specialized Behavioural Support Unit).



OT Monica Bourque with Veteran resident, Arnold Roberts.

Occupational Therapy is constantly evolving in terms of specific interventions, equipment and technology; however, the holistic approach and focus on person-centred care, quality of life and maximizing an individual's ability to complete meaningful occupations has remained at the core of Occupational Therapy and is aligned with the vision of the Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre. We are honoured and grateful that we have been selected as the "suitable young women" given the opportunity to carry on the legacy of Occupational Therapy practice alongside Veterans here at the Perley.

References for Photographs

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