

Jane Aitken and Karen Roberts



Industry profile: Occupational Therapy

Jane Aitken and Karen Roberts from Caulfield General Medical Centre describe the often mistaken role of the occupational therapist.

Well, this isn't the first time we've been asked to clarify our role as occupational therapists. People often mistake the inclusion of "occupation" as part of our job title and think of occupational health and safety or returning to work. In fact, it's not unusual to be told that our services are not required by an older person who says: "but love, I'm retired now!". It is probably helpful to explain that occupational therapists use the term "occupation" to refer to all of the daily activities that people are occupied in carrying out during their lives. And it's all of these things that occupational

therapists are interested in. We're interested in helping people return to, or continue all of their daily living activities, because what we do is important in forming our identity.

Occupational therapists are an integral part of the Amputee Rehabilitation team at Caulfield General Medical Centre. Caulfield began as an Army General Hospital, rehabilitating the soldiers returning from WW1. The first prosthetic service in Australia was actually established at Caulfield during 1916, to treat soldiers who had amputations through their war service. Despite the initial surprise when transferred to our renovated "barracks", patients frequently comment on the quick adjustment to our relaxed environment and friendly, hard working staff.

So what role does occupational therapy play in rehabilitation? Our initial contact with people involves a discussion about their lifestyle prior to losing a limb. We are interested in the activities that you did prior to your amputation (eg. Working, looking after a family, playing golf or enjoying the garden), the people who are important in your lives, the places that you carry out your activities and what is important to you. This helps us to build a picture of each person and assists us to establish a rehabilitation plan that is relevant to each person's daily life. We want to know what you value and the activities that you are most motivated to return to when you leave hospital.

As occupational therapists we work closely with you to help you



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regain your independence so that you can enjoy the activities that you previously enjoyed or perhaps explore new activities and roles. This journey may start with the fundamentals of transferring on and off a shower chair or getting about with a wheelchair. Further through the rehabilitation process, the focus may be preparing a meal whilst wearing your prosthesis, negotiating your local shopping centre or driving your car with a left foot accelerator. We consider ourselves problem solvers!

We also have an important role with those of you who have had upper limb amputations in teaching you how to use your prosthesis. We work closely with the prosthetist to help determine the most appropriate prosthesis to enable you to carry out your daily activities and then help you to practice a whole range of activities with your new "arm". We might teach you the basic grasping features of the prosthesis, help you learn how to operate the prosthesis and then practice doing such things as taking the lids off jars while baking, using your prosthesis to improve your golf swing or riding a bicycle.

We both particularly enjoy the opportunity to visit people's homes and workplaces, this gives us an insight into your lifestyle and ensures we are working in way that fits into your daily environments. We visit your home early in the rehabilitation process as often modifications are required to enable you to access your home safely, whether

using a wheelchair, crutches or a prosthesis.

We might assist you in deciding whether to install a ramp, grab rails next to the toilet or slip resistant flooring.

It is always satisfying to see people adjust to such a challenging life event as an amputation and to return to their homes and lives. Jane received a lovely letter from a patient recently that summed up the experience—they said: "From a veritable wreck when I arrived (in rehabilitation), I left with a smile on my face and a twinkle in my eye!"

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