

Occupational Therapy Assistant

■ Job Description

The occupational therapy assistant (OTA) works under the supervision of the occupational therapist to treat patients and carry out a broad range of occupational therapy services. In addition to working directly with patients, the assistant may also construct adaptive equipment and splints, maintain tools and equipment, keep patients' records, and prepare clinical notes. Many OTAs direct activity programs in long-term care settings.

■ Job Settings

OTAs are employed in rehabilitation centers, hospitals and outpatient clinics, psychiatric facilities, sheltered workshops, public and special schools, nursing homes, home health programs, day care centers, and community health agencies.

■ Projected Need

Nationally and in Illinois, employment of occupational therapy assistants and aides is expected to increase much faster than average through 2010.

Several factors will contribute to this growth. First, the baby boom generation is entering the age where they are most at risk for strokes. This will increase the need for occupational rehabilitation. Growth will also result from medical advances. Doctors can save more seriously injured people, and these patients usually need extensive therapy. Finally, demand for assistants may increase if hospitals hire them instead of therapists. Because assistants are paid less, hospitals find they fit more easily into their shrinking budgets.

Although this is predicted to be a very fast-growing occupation, the number of job openings will be low because of the small size of this occupation. Some jobs will result from growth. Other jobs will appear as current assistants retire or leave this occupation for other reasons.

In Illinois, there were about 630 people employed in this very small occupation in 2000.

■ Salaries

Nationally, the median wage for occupational therapy assistants is \$17.23 per hour. Half of all OTAs earn between \$14.66 and \$20.20 per hour.

In Illinois, salaries range from \$14.64 to \$20.38 per hour. Median wage is \$17.61.

■ Related Careers

Other rehabilitative therapies

■ Differences in Training

Education may be acquired in either a two-year associate degree program or a one-year certificate program. Illinois licensing requirements include completion of an associate degree program. Applicants to occupational therapy assistant programs can improve their chances of admission by taking high school courses in biology and health, and by performing volunteer work in nursing homes, occupational or physical therapist's offices, or elsewhere in the healthcare field.

The following community colleges in Illinois offer associate degree occupational therapy assistant programs:

Black Hawk College - Moline
College of DuPage - Glen Ellyn
Illinois Central College - East Peoria
John A. Logan College - Carterville
Lewis and Clark Community College - Godfrey
Lincoln Land Community College - Springfield
Parkland College - Champaign
Rend Lake College - Ina
Shawnee Community College - Ullin
South Suburban College - South Holland
Southeastern Illinois College - Harrisburg
Spoon River College - Canton
Wilbur Wright College - Chicago

■ Related Educational Programs

The programs of study listed below are the recommended areas of study to pursue for this occupation. Clicking on these will lead to files that show in-state and national schools that offer these programs.

The following link(s) will take you to CIS for more information. CIS requires an ID and password that can be obtained at <http://cis.ilworkinfo.com/loginhelp/> You must log into CIS prior to clicking on the links below.

[Occupational Therapy Assisting](#)

■ Skill Standards

One way to prepare for employment in this occupation is through meeting the standards endorsed by the Illinois Occupational Skill Standards and Credentialing Council (IOSSCC). Through the combined efforts of business, industry and education leaders, skill standards are developed for those occupations critical to the Illinois economy. *Skill standards define what you must know and be able to perform in order to pass a credentialing examination and obtain and keep a job in this field.* For more information regarding skill standards, contact the guidance counselor at your local high school or community college, visit your local Illinois Employment and Training Center (IETC), or access skill standards information at www.ioes.org/cte_curr/oss/index.html.

The IOSSCC has endorsed skill standards for the Occupational Therapy Cluster organized around the following performance areas:

- Service management functions
- Supervision
- Communication
- Support services
- General data collection
- Activities of daily living data collection
- Work and productive activities data collection
- Play or leisure activities data collection
- Sensorimotor, cognitive and psychosocial data collection
- Performance contents data collection
- General occupational therapy interventions
- Occupational therapy interventions for activities of daily living, work and productive activities, and play or leisure activities
- Occupational therapy interventions for sensorimotor, cognitive, and psychosocial
- Adjunctive occupational therapy intervention

■ Credentials

Thirty-seven states require occupational therapy assistants to be licensed or certified. Requirements vary by state. In Illinois, occupational therapy assistants must be licensed by the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation. To become licensed, applicants must complete an approved occupational therapy assistant program of at least two years in length, leading to an associate degree or its equivalent; pass a national certification exam; have at least two months of satisfactory supervised occupational therapy experience; and pay an application fee. Licensure must be renewed every two years.

Occupational therapy assistants who pass the certifying test of the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy receive the designation Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA).

■ Advanced Training

In addition to continuing education for all occupational therapy personnel, some COTAs continue their education to become OTRs.