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What to Expect on Fieldwork in Occupational Therapy

Fieldwork is a transformative experience for occupational therapy students where classroom instruction and practice are applied to real-life contexts. It is the route by which students begin to integrate knowledge, develop clinical reasoning skills, and shape their burgeoning professional identity as an occupational therapist.

- *Fieldwork experiences:* It is important to understand key differences between fieldwork levels. Level I fieldwork offers introductory hands-on experiences through observation and interactive learning when appropriate. In contrast, Level II fieldwork offers hands-on patient care experiences that are prolonged and with interactions that promote more in-depth professional and therapeutic skill development.
- *Procedures:* Expect to fulfill health clearances including background checks, physical examinations, updated vaccinations, and professional attire including scrub uniforms to accompany fieldwork site expectations.
- *Settings:* The Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) requirements establish standards for programs including integration of students within a variety of settings and across the lifespan to the fullest extent possible.
- *Supervision:* Supervisory models can vary depending on the facility, staff, and setting. The most common supervision style entails 1:1 opportunities. You may also experience oversight from two fieldwork educators, group supervision, and may even explore therapies in multiple settings during the same rotation.
- *Decision making:* Expect to leave the comforts of the classroom behind. You will apply your knowledge to unique clinical situations and complex patient scenarios. Distinctive to occupational therapy is employing a client-centered perspective for holistic outcomes as you work with patients!
- *Assessment:* You are likely to implement both standardized and non-standardized tools within your fieldwork settings. The breadth of available assessments makes it impractical to gain field-based experience with all types, but fieldworks will permit application of some assessment tools alongside evaluations and progress monitoring. Assessment data will also connect to clinical care including goal writing and intervention planning.
- *Intervention planning:* Most educators scaffold learning strategies that guide students to develop effective patient intervention plans. You can expect to add patients into your treatment planning agenda on a weekly basis during Level II fieldwork. A common recommendation is to employ activity analysis; plan for two upgrades and two downgrades per intervention for success when modifications are necessary in sessions.
- *Report writing:* Many programs teach students documentation via a SOAP note format, and for good reason! Documentation is highly varied per setting. Learning what fits where offers a baseline for producing flexible and accurate documentation skills. Documentation is also an area of expected proficiency for Level II rotations. Key concepts include concise wording, accuracy, timeliness, and justification for services, including service discontinuation, through well-reasoned clinical writing. Keep at it - charting becomes easier and more automatic with continued practice!
- *Caseload management:* Learning to efficiently organize and plan your day-to-day operations takes experience and time. You will learn to balance chart reviews, evaluations, intervention planning, team meetings, documentation, and evidence-based application to practice all within a single day.
- *Interprofessional collaboration:* It may seem daunting as a student, but you will soon learn that collaborating with your team facilitates better healthcare provisions. Seek inter-professional observations and collaborative conversations to build a well-rounded knowledge base that supports optimal patient outcomes.
- Occupational therapy is a dynamic profession! Learning is a continuous journey for all practitioners. The goal of fieldwork is to build clinical confidence and competence toward entry-level generalist skills that prepare you to become a practitioner following the NBCOT exam.