

rays and leg braces. Details of such coverage vary among plans. However, routine foot care—including the removal of corns and calluses—is ordinarily not covered, unless the patient has a systemic condition that has resulted in severe circulatory problems or areas of desensitization in the legs or feet. Like dental services, podiatric care is more dependent on disposable income than other medical services.

Employment of podiatrists would grow even faster were it not for continued emphasis on controlling the costs of specialty healthcare. Insurers will balance the cost of sending patients to podiatrists against the cost and availability of substitute practitioners, such as physicians and physical therapists. Opportunities will be better for board-certified podiatrists, because many managed care organizations require board-certification. Opportunities for newly trained podiatrists will be better in group medical practices, clinics, and health networks than in a traditional solo practice. Establishing a practice will be most difficult in the areas surrounding colleges of podiatric medicine because podiatrists are concentrated in these locations.

Over the next 10 years, members of the “baby boom” generation will begin to retire, creating vacancies. Relatively few job openings from this source are expected, however, because the occupation is small.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of salaried podiatrists were \$107,560 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$77,440 and \$134,900 a year. According to a survey by *Podiatry Management* magazine, median net income of podiatrists in solo practice, including the self-employed, was \$89,681 in 2000. Those in group practices or partnerships earned median net income of \$96,200 in 2000. Self-employed podiatrists must provide for their own health insurance and retirement.

Related Occupations

Workers in other occupations who apply scientific knowledge to prevent, diagnose, and treat disorders and injuries are chiropractors, dentists, optometrists, physicians and surgeons, and veterinarians.

Sources of Additional Information

For information on podiatric medicine as a career, contact:

► American Podiatric Medical Association, 9312 Old Georgetown Rd., Bethesda, MD 20814-1621. Internet: <http://www.apma.org>

Information on colleges of podiatric medicine, entrance requirements, curriculums, and student financial aid is available from:

► American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine, 1350 Piccard Dr., Suite 322, Rockville, MD 20850-4307. Internet: <http://www.aacpm.org>

Recreational Therapists

(O*NET 29-1125.00)

Significant Points

- Employment growth is expected in assisted living, physical and psychiatric rehabilitation, and services for people with disabilities.
- Opportunities should be best for persons with a bachelor's degree in therapeutic recreation or in recreation with a concentration in therapeutic recreation.

Nature of the Work

Recreational therapists, also referred to as *therapeutic recreation specialists*, provide treatment services and recreation activities to individuals with disabilities, illnesses, or other disabling conditions. Therapists treat and maintain the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of clients using a variety of techniques, including the use of arts and crafts, animals, sports, games, dance and movement, drama, music, and community outings. Therapists help individuals reduce depression, stress, and anxiety. They also help individuals recover basic motor functioning and reasoning abilities, build confidence, and socialize effectively to enable greater independence, as well as to reduce or eliminate the effects of illness or disability. Additionally, they help integrate people with disabilities into the community by helping them use community resources and recreational activities. Recreational therapists should not be confused with recreation and fitness workers, who organize recreational activities primarily for enjoyment. (Recreation and fitness workers are discussed elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

In acute healthcare settings, such as hospitals and rehabilitation centers, recreational therapists treat and rehabilitate individuals with specific health conditions, usually in conjunction or collaboration with physicians, nurses, psychologists, social workers, and physical and occupational therapists. In long-term and residential care facilities, recreational therapists use leisure activities—especially structured group programs—to improve and maintain general health and well-being. They may also treat clients and provide interventions to prevent further medical problems and secondary complications related to illness and disabilities.

Recreational therapists assess clients, based on information from standardized assessments, observations, medical records, medical staff, family, and clients themselves. They then develop and carry out therapeutic interventions consistent with client needs and interests. For example, clients isolated from others, or with limited social skills, may be encouraged to play games with others, or right-handed persons with right-side paralysis may be instructed to adapt to using their nonaffected left side to throw a ball or swing a racket. Recreational therapists may instruct patients in relaxation techniques to reduce stress and tension, stretching and limbering exercises, proper body mechanics for participation in recreation activities, pacing and energy conservation techniques, and individual as well as team activities. Additionally, therapists observe and document patients' participation, reactions, and progress.



Recreational therapists provide treatment services and recreation activities to individuals with disabilities and illnesses.

Community-based therapeutic recreation specialists may work in park and recreation departments, special education programs for school districts, or programs for older adults and people with disabilities. Included in the latter group are programs and facilities such as assisted living, adult day care, and substance abuse rehabilitation centers. In these programs, therapists use interventions to develop specific skills while providing opportunities for exercise, mental stimulation, creativity, and fun. Although most therapists are employed in other areas, those who work in schools help counselors, teachers, and parents address the special needs of students—most importantly, easing the transition into adult life for disabled students.

Working Conditions

Recreational therapists provide services in special activity rooms but also plan activities and prepare documentation in offices. When working with clients during community integration programs, they may travel locally to instruct clients on the accessibility of public transportation and other public areas, such as parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, restaurants, and theaters.

Therapists often lift and carry equipment as well as lead recreational activities. Recreational therapists generally work a 40-hour week that may include some evenings, weekends, and holidays.

Employment

Recreational therapists held about 29,000 jobs in 2000. Almost 40 percent of salaried jobs for therapists were in nursing and personal care facilities, and over 30 percent were in hospitals. Others worked in residential facilities, community mental health centers, adult day care programs, correctional facilities, community programs for people with disabilities, and substance abuse centers. Only a small number of therapists were self-employed, generally contracting with long-term care facilities or community agencies to develop and oversee programs.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

A bachelor's degree in therapeutic recreation, or in recreation with a concentration in therapeutic recreation, is the usual requirement for entry-level positions. Persons may qualify for paraprofessional positions with an associate degree in therapeutic recreation or a health care related field. An associate degree in recreational therapy; training in art, drama, or music therapy; or qualifying work experience may be sufficient for activity director positions in nursing homes.

There are approximately 160 programs that prepare recreational therapists. Most offer bachelor's degrees, although some also offer associate, master's, or doctoral degrees. Programs include courses in assessment, treatment and program planning, intervention design, and evaluation. Students also study human anatomy, physiology, abnormal psychology, medical and psychiatric terminology, characteristics of illnesses and disabilities, professional ethics, and the use of assistive devices and technology.

Most employers prefer to hire candidates who are certified therapeutic recreation specialists (CTRS). The National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification (NCTRC) certifies therapeutic recreation specialists. To presently become certified, specialists must have a bachelor's degree, pass a written certification examination, and complete an internship of at least 360 hours. Beginning in 2003, however, specialists will be required to complete an internship of at least 480 hours, in addition to the degree and examination requirements.

Recreational therapists should be comfortable working with persons who are ill or have disabilities. Therapists must be patient, tactful, and persuasive when working with people who have a variety of special needs. Ingenuity, a sense of humor, and imagination are needed to adapt activities to individual needs; and good physical coordination is necessary to demonstrate or participate in recreational activities.

Therapists may advance to supervisory or administrative positions. Some teach, conduct research, or consult for health or social services agencies.

Job Outlook

Overall employment of recreational therapists is expected to grow more slowly than the average for all occupations through the year 2010. Employment will decline slightly in the two largest sectors employing recreational therapists, hospitals and nursing homes, as services shift to outpatient settings and employers emphasize cost containment. However, fast employment growth is expected in assisted living, outpatient physical and psychiatric rehabilitation, and services for people with disabilities. Opportunities should be best for persons with a bachelor's degree in therapeutic recreation or in recreation with an option in therapeutic recreation.

Healthcare facilities will provide a growing number of jobs in hospital-based adult day care and outpatient programs and in units offering short-term mental health and alcohol or drug abuse services. Rehabilitation, home healthcare, transitional programs, and psychiatric facilities will provide additional jobs.

The rapidly growing number of older adults is expected to spur job growth for therapeutic recreation specialists and recreational therapy paraprofessionals in assisted living facilities, adult day care programs, and social service agencies. Continued growth also is expected in community residential facilities, as well as day care programs for individuals with disabilities.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of recreational therapists were \$28,650 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$21,780 and \$36,070 a year. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$17,010, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$43,810 a year. Median annual earnings for recreational therapists in 2000 were \$32,520 in hospitals and \$23,240 in nursing and personal care facilities.

Related Occupations

Recreational therapists primarily design activities to help people with disabilities lead more fulfilling and independent lives. Other workers who have similar jobs are occupational therapists, physical therapists, recreation and fitness workers, and rehabilitation counselors.

Sources of Additional Information

For information on how to order materials describing careers and academic programs in recreational therapy, write to:

- ▶ American Therapeutic Recreation Association, 1414 Prince St., Suite 204, Alexandria, VA 22314-2853. Internet: <http://www.atra-tr.org>
- ▶ National Therapeutic Recreation Society, 22377 Belmont Ridge Rd., Ashburn, VA 20148-4501. Internet: <http://www.nrpa.org/branches/ntrs.htm>

Certification information may be obtained from:

- ▶ National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification, 7 Elmwood Dr., New City, NY 10956. Internet: <http://www.nctrc.org>