

Recreational Therapy in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

Recreational therapists (RTs) work with individuals in physical medicine and rehabilitation (PMR) units to improve functional independence as part of the interdisciplinary care team. They provide goal-oriented interventions that focus on the needs of each individual.

Clients in PMR have acquired limitations as a result of stroke, brain injury, spinal cord injury, amputation, orthopedic or other neurological conditions, and/or medical deconditioning. Resuming life activities following these conditions can be difficult.

Recreational Therapy aims to reduce or eliminate these limitations to allow a return to a healthy and meaningful lifestyle. RTs are trained in anatomy and physiology; motor behavior; psychology; abnormal psychology; human growth and development; activity analysis; community integration, inclusion, and transitioning; recreation, leisure, and play modalities; leisure education and counseling; lifestyle health; and additional interventions and strategies to assist the individual to function as independently as possible in their environment.

Recreational Therapy, also known as therapeutic recreation, is a systematic process that utilizes recreation and other activity-based interventions to address the assessed needs of individuals with illnesses and/or disabling conditions, as a means to psychological and physical health, recovery and well-being. Further, Recreational Therapy means a treatment service designed to restore, remediate, and rehabilitate a person's level of functioning and independence in life activities, to promote health

and wellness as well as reduce or eliminate the activity limitations and restrictions to participation in life situations caused by an illness or disabling condition (ATRA, 2015).



Examples of the manner in which RTs apply this knowledge and skills into action within a PMR setting include:

- Improving physical, cognitive, and social functioning through activity and community participation.
- Constructing a healthy leisure lifestyle that supports continued recovery, health promotion, and quality of life.

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- Fabricating and training in the use of adaptive equipment to maximize activity and community engagement and recovery.
- Providing community integration training during which physical, cognitive, and social skills are challenged and enhanced.

Recreational Therapy is listed as a rehabilitation therapy service in the Joint Commission (JC) standards; a treatment team member in the acute brain injury, the post-acute brain injury, and the inpatient rehabilitation standards of the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF); a treatment service in the mix of treatment and rehabilitation services identified by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), which is used to determine federal compliance in rehabilitation facilities; and as a Related Service under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

A sampling of RT evidence-based research in PMR

- Inpatient RT for children with traumatic brain injury was a significant predictor for change in cognition and psychosocial Wee-FIM scores (Phillips, 2009).

- Increased time on community integration training provided by RTs in spinal cord injury (SCI) rehabilitation resulted in higher social integration and mobility scores, less re-hospitalization one year after injury, decreased pressure ulcers, increased prediction of sports involvement and outdoor activities one year after injury, higher Functional Independence Measure (FIM) motor scores at



discharge. More RT during SCI inpatient rehabilitation was also associated with higher social integration scores and higher satisfaction with life (Backus et al., 2013).

- Inpatient RT for adolescents and adults who sustained a stroke was a significant predictor of change in motor, cognition, and total FIM scores (Williams et al., 2007).

Backus, D., Gassaway, J., Smout, R., Hsieh, C., Heinemann, A., DeJong, G., & Horn, S. (2013). Relation between inpatient and postdischarge services and outcomes 1 year postinjury in people with traumatic spinal cord injury. *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*, 94(4 Suppl 2), S165-74.

Phillips, H. (2009). *Recreational therapy services and the functional independence of inpatient pediatric population* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from The ScholarShip.

Williams, R., Barrett, J., Vercoe, H., Maahs-Fladung, C., Loy, D., & Skalko, T. (2007). Effects of recreational therapy on functional independence of people recovering from stroke. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 41(4), 326-332.



Recreational Therapists are professionally credentialed by the National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification (NCTRC). The Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) “exemplifies the profession’s dedication to quality standards and excellence.” The CTRS is recognized as the qualified provider of recreational therapy services.

Empowering Recreational Therapists to Empower Those They Serve