

# Frequently Asked Questions about Recreational Therapists



## What do Recreational Therapists do?

A recreational therapist utilizes a wide range of activity and community based interventions and techniques to improve the physical, cognitive, emotional, social and leisure needs of their clients. Recreational therapists assist clients to develop skills, knowledge and behaviors for daily living and community involvement. The therapist works with the client and their family to incorporate specific interests and community resources into therapy to achieve optimal outcomes that transfer to their real life situation.

## Why is Recreational Therapy important for your clients? □

HCRT Research supports the concept that people with active, satisfying lifestyles will be happier and healthier. Recreational therapy provides services which are based on the individuals' interests and lifestyle which allows them to better engage in therapy and apply these functional improvements to all areas of their life. Ultimately, it allows them to generalize their therapeutic outcomes to their life after the healthcare team is no longer involved resulting in greater health maintenance over time. Recreational therapy aims to improve an individual's functioning and keep them as active, healthy and independent as possible in their chosen life pursuits.

## What clients do Recreational Therapists serve?

Recreational Therapists may work with a wide range of individuals requiring health services including geriatric, mental health, addictions, general medicine, physical medicine and rehabilitation, developmental disabilities and pediatric clients.

### **Where can you find Recreational Therapists working?**

HCRT Most recreational therapists are employed by health care agencies and work in traditional inpatient hospitals or health facilities but an increasing number are being hired in residential facilities, community mental health centers, adult day care programs, substance abuse centers, hospice care, community centers and in school systems. There is a growing trend for recreational therapists to work in private practice providing services in the home and community as well.

### **How are Recreational Therapy services different from other therapies?**



HCRT Recreational therapy embraces a definition of "health" which includes not only the absence of "illness", but extends to enhancement of physical, cognitive, emotional, social and leisure development so individuals may participate fully and independently in chosen life pursuits. The unique feature of recreational therapy that makes it different from other therapies is the use of recreational modalities in the designed intervention strategies. Recreational therapy is extremely individualized to each person, their past, present and future interests and lifestyle. The recreational therapist has a unique perspective regarding the social, cognitive, physical, and leisure needs of the patient. Incorporating client's interests, and the client's family and/or community makes the therapy process meaningful and relevant. Recreational therapists weave the concept of healthy living into treatment to ensure not only improved functioning, but also to enhance independence and successful involvement in all aspects of life.

### **How are Recreational Therapy services recognized?**

HCRT Recreational therapy is defined by the American Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA) as a health care and human service discipline that delivers treatment services designed to restore, remediate and/or rehabilitate functional capabilities for persons with injuries, chronic illnesses and all types of disabling conditions (ATRA 1986). Recreational therapists are standard treatment team members in rehabilitation services. Recreational therapy is listed as a rehabilitation therapy service in the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) standards. In addition, recreational therapists are designated as

## FAQ's

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treatment team members (based upon need) in the acute brain injury, the post-acute brain injury, and the inpatient rehabilitation standards of the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) includes recreational therapy in the mix of treatment and rehabilitation services used to determine federal compliance in skilled nursing, rehabilitation (physical and psychiatric) and long-term care facilities. Therapeutic Recreation is specifically indicated as a Related Service under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. A few states regulate this profession through licensure, certification, registration or regulation of titles.

## What are the outcomes of Recreational Therapy?

Current research indicates a significant number of positive health outcomes resulting from participation in recreational therapy programs:

- Improvement in Physical Health Status
- Improvement in Psychosocial Status
- Improvement in Cognitive Status
- Improvement in Life, Recreation & Community Activities

## What are a Recreational Therapist's Education, Qualifications, & Credentials?

HCRT A qualified recreational therapist is someone who is nationally certified as a certified therapeutic recreation specialist (CTRS), usually referred to as recreational therapists. Qualified professionals are certified through the National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification (NCTRC) <http://www.nctrc.org>, which requires a bachelors degree or higher from an accredited

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university, a formal internship and the passing of a national certification examination. A CTRS must maintain their credential every five years through the NCTRC recertification process. Academic programs in therapeutic recreation or recreational therapy emphasize course work in the physical, biological, and behavioral sciences and recreation and leisure theory.



### **How can I get Recreational Therapy services?**

HCRT Many healthcare facilities have a therapy referral process in place, and include recreational therapy as part of their standard referral process for other ordered therapies and services. Once the referral for recreational therapy is made, usually by the physician or health care professional responsible for the client's care an assessment should be completed by the CTRS. On many inpatient program units a standard order is provided for each new resident "to evaluate for recreational therapy services". Clients from outpatient, home health or community programs may also be appropriate for recreational therapy, and the referral is done on a case-by-case basis.

### **Where is Recreational Therapy headed in the future?**

HCRT According to the US Department of Labor, "The rapidly growing number of older adults is expected to spur job growth for recreational therapy professionals and paraprofessionals in assisted-living facilities, adult daycare programs, and other social assistance agencies. Continued growth also is expected in community residential care facilities, as was daycare programs for individuals with disabilities."

About the American Therapeutic Recreation Association.... The American Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA) is the national membership organization representing the

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interests and needs of recreational therapists. The association is directed by an elected board of directors with over 42 volunteer teams and committees, focused on areas such as public policy, coverage and reimbursement, diagnostic specialty groups, education and research. An executive director leads the association national office in Alexandria, Virginia. The association provides a vast array of membership services focusing on professional practice, professional development, external affairs, advocacy, treatment networking and educational services. Specifically, ATRA leads the profession with nationally recognized professional standards of practice, code of ethics and competency guidelines.