

Recreational Therapist

Professional Activities

Recreational therapists plan, direct, and coordinate recreation-based treatment programs for people with disabilities, injuries, or illnesses. Recreational therapists use a variety of modalities, including arts and crafts, drama, music, and dance, sports, games, and community reintegration field trips to help maintain or improve a patient's physical, social, and emotional well-being.

Recreational therapists typically do the following:

- Assess patients' needs through observations, medical records, tests, and talking with other healthcare professionals, patients' families, and patients
- Create treatment plans and programs that meet patients' needs and interests
- Plan and implement interventions to prevent harm to a patient
- Engage patients in therapeutic activities, such as games and field trips
- Help patients learn social skills needed to become or remain independent
- Teach patients about ways to cope with anxiety or depression
- Record and analyze a patient's progress
- Evaluate interventions for effectiveness

Recreational therapists can help people with disabilities to integrate into the community by teaching them how to use community resources and recreational activities. For example, therapists may teach a patient who uses a wheelchair how to use public transportation. Therapists may work with physicians or surgeons, registered nurses, psychologists, social workers, physical therapists, teachers, or occupational therapists.

Educational Requirements

Most recreational therapists need a bachelor's degree in recreational therapy or a related field. Though less common, associate's, master's, and doctoral degrees are also available. Recreational therapy programs include courses in assessment, human anatomy, medical and psychiatric terminology, characteristics of illnesses and disabilities, and the use of assistive devices and technology. Bachelor's degree programs usually include an internship.

Licenses, Certifications, and Registrations

Most employers, particularly those in hospitals and other clinical settings, prefer to hire certified recreational therapists. The National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification (NCTRC) offers the Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) credential. Certification requires a bachelor's degree, completion of a supervised internship (normally completed as part of their degree program) of at least 560 hours, and passing an exam. Although therapists typically need at least a bachelor's degree in recreational therapy, in some cases therapists may qualify for certification with an alternate combination of education, training, and experience. Therapists must also take continuing education classes to maintain certification.

NCTRC also offers specialty certification in five areas of practice: behavioral health, community inclusion services, developmental disabilities, geriatrics, and physical medicine/rehabilitation. Therapists may also earn certificates from other organizations to show proficiency in specific therapy techniques, such as aquatic therapy or aromatherapy. As of 2012, only New Hampshire, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Utah required recreational therapists to obtain a license. Requirements vary by state. For specific requirements, contact the state's medical board.

Academic Programs

[Chicago State University](#)
[Eastern Illinois University](#)
[Illinois State University](#)

[Southern Illinois University](#)
[University of St. Francis](#)
[Western Illinois University](#)

Employment/Salary Outlook

As the large baby-boom generation ages, they will need recreational therapists to help treat age-related injuries and illnesses. Older persons are more likely to suffer from stroke, Alzheimer's disease, and mobility-related injuries that require recreational therapy. Continued growth is expected in nursing care facilities, adult daycare programs, and other settings that care for geriatric patients. Therapists will also be needed to help healthy seniors remain active in their communities and maintain their independence later in life. In addition, third party payers will continue to use therapists' services as a way to cut costs in patients' recoveries from injuries or illnesses, moving treatment to outpatient settings rather than more costly hospital settings.

State and National Wages

Location	Pay Period	2021		
		Low	Median	High
United States	Hourly	\$15.25	\$23.05	\$38.10
	Annual	\$37,990	\$47,940	\$80,610
Illinois	Hourly	\$18.27	\$27.87	\$41.31
	Annual	\$37,990	\$57,970	\$85,920

State and National Trends

United States	Employment		Percent Change	Projected Annual Job ¹
	2021	2031		
Recreational Therapists	17,600	18,200	4%	1,500
Illinois	Employment		Percent Change	Projected Annual Job ¹
	2020	2030		
Recreational Therapists	680	710	+4%	50

Professional Organizations

National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification (nctrc.org)

American Therapeutic Recreation Association (atra-online.com)

References

Occupational Outlook Handbook, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics
(<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/recreational-therapists.htm>)

O*NET OnLine (<http://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/29-1125.00>)

CareerOneStop (<https://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Careers/Occupations/occupation-profile.aspx?keyword=Recreational%20Therapists&onetcode=29112500&location=Illinois>)

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