

Job Title

Art Therapist

General Overview

Art therapists provide a health service that combines psychotherapy and the creative process of making art, thought to be therapeutic, to help individuals explore personal issues and express thoughts and feelings. An art therapist can work with individuals, couples, families or in group settings with people of any age who do not have any artistic experience (About art therapy, n.d.). The ultimate goal of an art therapist is to help their client express their inner psychological world through forms of visual art such as, painting, drawing, or sculpting and furthermore, to help their clients recognize and resolve the issues raised by their artwork (Art/music therapist, n.d.).

Job duties and responsibilities

Art therapists can be self-employed and have a private practice or work for private and public counseling agencies in health services, social services, community settings or educational settings (Art/music therapist, n.d.). Their main goal is to help clients (for example, cancer patients, schizophrenia patients, drug addicts, developmentally delayed children etc.) express their emotions through art. Therefore, an art therapist must provide and prepare the materials and instructions for the client's treatment and then interpret and discuss their art with them. Art therapists also perform assessments to come up with long-term treatment plans and goals (Art Therapist), as well as monitor the clients' progress. Also, as art therapists often work as part of a team, they may have to oversee and coordinate staff, coordinate programs and handle administrative duties (Art/music therapist, n.d.).

Typical workday

Art therapists who are self employed and have a private practice have to schedule appointments at their clients' convenience (which may include evenings or weekends) although, therapists who work in institutions usually work regular office hours (Art/music therapist, n.d.) Art therapists can work for private and public counseling agencies in health services, social services, community settings or educational settings. Examples include, but are not limited to, hospitals, halfway houses, shelters, elder care locations, universities, schools and correctional facilities (Art/music therapist, n.d.). An art therapist can work with individuals, couples, families or in group settings (About art therapy, n.d.). Art therapists also often interact with various team members such as doctors, psychologists, social workers, and other professionals during their treatment of their client (Art/music therapist, n.d.). Art therapists have to also supply the art supplies/artistic material required to accomplish therapy session objectives (Summary report for art therapists, 2013).

Educational requirements and other qualifications

In Canada a Bachelor of Arts is required to enter an art therapy program. It is recommended to have art (art history, art education, art theory, drawing, painting, and sculpting) and psychology courses from the university level (see below). Art therapy programs include post-graduate certificates graduate diplomas, and Master's Degree programs. The following art therapy training programs have been approved by the Canadian Art Therapy Association: Prairie

Institute of Arts Therapy, St. Stephen's College (Alberta), British Columbia School of Art Therapy, Kutenai Art therapy Institute, Vancouver Art Therapy Institute (British Columbia), Toronto Art Therapy Institute (Ontario), Concordia University, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue (Quebec) (Become an art therapist, n.d.).

In addition to a Bachelor of Arts, many art therapy programs will require the submission of a portfolio of 10-20 personal art images along with your application. Previous work/volunteer experience in a clinical, rehabilitative, or educational setting is also highly desirable (Admission requirements,2013).

Related skills, interests and qualities

Art therapy is a social, artistic and investigative occupation that involves working/communicating with others, working with designs and patterns, and working with ideas in order to figure out problems mentally (Summary report for art therapists, 2013). Based on Holland's occupational themes, (Holland codes, n.d.), art therapy involves: teaching, training, enlightening, curing and developing others; working with forms, designs and pattern and the creative expression of ideas and emotions; and analytical thinking. Art therapists must be compassionate as they work with clients who are dealing with difficult psychological problems. They must have excellent interpersonal skills, patience, a desire to help others, creativity, imagination, and a background in visual arts (Art/music therapist, n.d.). A challenge that art therapists might encounter is encouraging their clients to see art therapy as a means of understanding themselves although, it is important that art therapists remain patient and continue working with their clients (Art/music therapist, n.d.).

Relevance of Psychology undergraduate degree

An undergraduate psychology degree is useful to those aspiring to pursue art therapy, as a Bachelor of Arts is required to enter an art therapy program in Canada. Furthermore, a Bachelor of Arts majoring in psychology would be particularly useful, as some art therapy programs require psychology courses at the university level (which do not include counselling) for entry into an art therapy program. For example, Introduction to Psychology, Introduction to Research Methods in Psychology, Foundations of Developmental Psychology, Introduction to the Study of Personality, and Abnormal Psychology are required psychology courses for admission into the art therapy program at Concordia University (Admission requirements,2013). Other useful psychology courses include: Introduction to Statistics in Psychology, Issues in Personality, and Advanced Topics in Developmental Psychology.

Salary potential

Salaries of art therapists are comparable to those of a counsellor, social worker or therapist. However, exact earnings will vary depending on geographic location, type of practice (private practice or for an agency), education level (therapists with master's degrees usually have higher earnings than those with less education), reputation and job responsibilities (Art/music therapist, n.d.)

In Canada, individuals may start as a clinical intern and make \$25000-\$35000 a year, assessing and treating patients under the supervision of an experienced art therapist. As an Art Therapist, individuals can make \$35000-\$55000 a year, assessing and treating patients and coming up with long term treatment plans. As a Program Head, an art therapist can make \$55000

- \$80000 a year or more performing some assessment and treatment of patients; overseeing and coordinating staff; coordinating programs and handling administrative duties (Art/music therapist, n.d.). More specifically, the average annual salary for art therapists in Canada is \$53,985 with hourly wages ranging from \$16.47 - \$44.16 (Art therapist salary, 2013).

Job outlook

Currently, there are not many opportunities for art therapists because of low awareness of the profession. Projected growth for Art therapists is 10-20% between 2010-2020 (Summary report for art therapists, 2013). Furthermore, art therapists work in the health care industry which unfortunately, is often prone to government cutbacks therefore, art therapists must be flexible to move to other avenues of opportunity. Art therapists can also move into other fields, such as counseling, daycare, and other mental health profession (Art/music therapist, n.d.).

To apply

1. Complete a Bachelor of Arts fulfilling necessary visual art and psychology requirements.
2. Attempt to gain work/volunteer experience in a clinical, rehabilitative, or education setting while studying to facilitate the next step.
3. Apply to an art therapy program approved by the Canadian Art Therapy Association.
4. Attempt to make strong professional contacts while studying, especially during practical training which should facilitate the next step.
5. Look for a job or start a private practice.

To know more

- Canadian Art Therapy Association: <http://canadianarttherapy.org/>
- Ontario Art Therapy Association: <http://www.oata.ca/>
- International Art Therapy Organization: <http://www.internationalarttherapy.org/>

References

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