

Novice Gerontology Practitioner FAQs

Question 1: I am a new graduate working in a skilled nursing facility with limited assessment tools and equipment for a caseload with a wide variety of diagnoses. What resources would be helpful to develop my assessment and intervention skills for this population?

Answer: It can be initially frustrating to have a limited amount of resources available for assessment and intervention. However, talking to other therapists at your facility may be helpful. Some assessments are available at little or no cost. In addition, having limited resources for intervention tools can spur creativity for different activities for intervention. Try providing the intervention in various areas of the nursing facility such as the patient's room, the day room, or the outdoor courtyard—the furniture in the functional environment becomes the treatment equipment. Find out what activities or equipment the activity department has that you may use. You may also be able to use food from the kitchen for treatment. It could be as simple as using some apples from the kitchen to slice and peel. Several resources are available to help you locate information on evaluation and intervention for older adults. It may also be helpful to check current occupational therapy textbooks, AOTA products, AOTA Practice Guidelines, gerontology journals, and organizations that focus on conditions related to older adulthood. The following are examples of some available resources. In addition to the ones listed below, check aging organizations in your community for local and community-based resources.

Gerontology Organizations

- *Administration on Aging* [www.aoa.gov]
- *American Society on Aging* [www.asaging.org]
- *AARP* [www.aarp.org]
- *Gerontological Society of America* [www.geron.org]
- *National Council on Aging* [www.ncoa.org/research]

Evaluation/Intervention (available from the AOTA online store at store.aota.org)

- *Occupational Therapy Assessment Tools: An Annotated Index, 3rd Edition (With CD-ROM)*
- Self-paced clinical courses, such as *Low Vision: Occupational Therapy Intervention With the Older Adult* or *Neurorehabilitation*
- Online courses, such as *Fundamentals of Occupational Therapy for Individuals With Dementia*, *Low Vision in Older Adults*, *Advanced Occupational Therapy for Individuals With Dementia*
- Audio or Web-based gerontology courses

- *Gerontology Special Interest Section Quarterly Newsletter*
- *OT Practice* articles that focus on gerontology-related topics
- AOTA Practice Guidelines (e.g., *Driving and Community Mobility for Older Adults*, *Home Modifications*, etc.)

Tool Kits

- Caregiver Tool Kit: *Family Caregiver Alliance at the National Center on Caregiving* [www.caregiver.org]
- Fall Prevention Tool Kit: *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (falls prevention toolkit) [www.cdc.gov/ncipc/duip/spotlite/falls.htm]
- Mobility Information: *Wheelchairnet* (resource section on older adult wheelchair users) [www.wheelchairnet.org/WCN_Living/older.html]

Question 2: I am a new graduate working in a skilled nursing facility. Where can I locate information on therapy rules and requirements?

Answer: Documentation is a complex issue that varies from practice setting to practice setting, and can depend on the reimbursement source and your local fiscal intermediary. Here are a few basic resources to help clinicians learn the basics about documentation and reimbursement. It would also be helpful to check your state practice act for information particular to your state, including guidelines on supervision and required documentation. In addition, always find out who the fiscal intermediary is for the facility and go to their Web site to locate their rules. Find out your company's policy and procedures on documentation as well as the facility's policies and procedures. Review the Web sites below for Medicare-related practices for documentation.

Reimbursement and Advocacy Resources

- Robinson, M. (2007, Feb. 19). Medicare 101: Understanding the basics, *OT Practice*, 12(3), CE-1–CE-8.
- AOTA Practitioner Reimbursement [www.aota.org/Practitioners/Reimb.aspx]
- *Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services* [www.cms.hhs.gov]
 - Skilled Nursing Facility Education/Training [www.cms.hhs.gov/SNFPPS/07_Education.asp]
 - Overview of Therapy Services [www.cms.hhs.gov/TherapyServices/01_overview.asp#TopOfPage]
 - Online Manual System [www.cms.hhs.gov/manuals/]

- FAQs Medicare (**need web information**)
- Medlearn [www.cms.hhs.gov/medlearn/]

Question 3: I am a new to working in gerontology and interested in learning ways to network with other therapists in this field. Do you have any suggestions?

Answer: Networking is a great way to learn from others! As a new therapist it can be overwhelming when you jump into a new field of practice. It will take time to deepen your knowledge and gain confidence in your skills. Sometimes it's helpful to talk with other therapists who have been working with older adults for a while and can offer advice or suggestions. The following are some ways that you can begin to network with others.

- Join a journal club to learn the latest research on gerontology.
- Participate in AOTA's OTConnections or your state gerontology listserv.
- Have lunch & learn sessions where you work.
- Attend state and national OT and gerontology conferences.
- Join state and national OT and gerontology organizations.
- Join state and AOTA gerontology special interest section groups.
- Locate a mentor with experience in gerontology in your particular practice setting.