

Occupational Therapists and Occupational Therapy Assistants

Occupational therapists (OTs) work in a variety of settings. They provide evaluation and intervention for individuals with or at risk of psychiatric, addiction, behavioral issues, and cognitive disabilities. They provide therapy with the purpose of building or enhancing skills, developing habits, routines, and roles, or modifying and adapting the environment so that individuals are successful in their activities at home, work, school, or other settings. OTs focus on the physical, cognitive, psychological, sensory, and other aspects of participation in everyday life throughout the lifespan.

OTs are ranked as a tier 3 behavioral health professional; this refers to a basic ranking of behavioral health professionals in North Dakota based on their scope of practice, with tier 1 being the highest rank and tier 4 being the lowest.

Occupational Therapy Education

OTs and occupational therapy assistants (OTAs) are required to obtain a degree in occupational therapy from a program that is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE). Occupational therapy degree programs include coursework and fieldwork experiences in behavioral health settings.

The University of North Dakota (UND) School of Medicine & Health Sciences has two fully-accredited master's degree programs in OT, located in Grand Forks, North Dakota and Casper, Wyoming. UND currently has candidacy status for accreditation for a doctoral program for OTs. University of Mary (Bismarck, North Dakota) also has an OT program with both master's and doctoral degrees. Their master's degree program is fully accredited by ACOTE, and they are in step 2 of the initial accreditation process for their doctoral degree program. The North Dakota State College of Science has an OTA program in Wahpeton, and this program has been fully accredited since 1972.

Licensure Criteria

Licensure requirements for occupational therapists include:

- Provide evidence to the Board of Occupational Therapy Practice demonstrating competence in the field.
- Adhere to the code of ethics adopted by the Board.

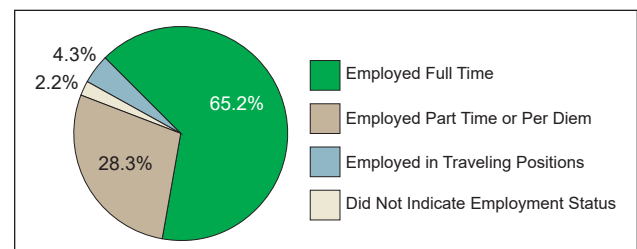
- Show evidence of successful completion of the academic requirements approved by the Board.
- Pass an examination approved by the Board.
- Complete a period of supervised fieldwork.

Data from 2019 UND Occupational Therapy Graduates

Exit interview data for UND OT graduates was obtained in 2020 to track students' progress after graduation. In May 2019, a total of 52 students graduated from the OT program. Four students graduated in August of 2019, two students graduated in December of 2019, and 62 students graduated in May 2020. Of the 58 students who graduated in May through December of 2019, 46 completed the exit interview. Most graduates were from Minnesota (22 graduates, 47.8%). North Dakota had the second-highest number of graduates with 7 (15.2%), followed by Wyoming with 4 (8.7%), and 13 (28.2%) from other states.

The current practice locations of graduates included Minnesota (n = 14, 33.3%), North Dakota (n = 6, 14.3%), Wyoming (n = 5, 11.9%), and other states (n = 17, 40.5%). In addition, 65.2% were employed full-time, 28.3% part-time, or as needed; among these, 4.3% took traveling positions (Figure 1). The starting annual expected salary for the 2019 OT class was reported to be between \$50,000 and \$69,000.

Figure 1. Occupational Therapy Graduates Employment after Graduation



Factors That Influence the Working Environment of OTs and OTAs

According to licensure data from the UND OT graduates, the main factors that influenced graduates' decisions about working environments include:

- Loan repayment

- Closeness to family
- Salary and benefits
- Positive experience in fieldwork
- Mentorship

Occupational Therapy Data for North Dakota

In addition to information on UND OT graduates, statewide licensure data for OTs and OTAs was obtained from the North Dakota Board of Occupational Therapy Practice (NDBOTP). This data indicates that as of 2020, there were 703 OT professionals licensed in North Dakota, of which 547 were OTs and 156 were OTAs. There were 9.2 OTs and 2.1 OTAs per 10,000 residents licensed in North Dakota.

Practice Setting for OTs and OTAs

Education and practice interest area were two deciding factors regarding employment in the field of OT. On average, most OT professionals in North Dakota had approximately 13 years and 5 months of practice. Practice settings comprised different types of working environments including rehab facilities, occupational clinics, and home health settings such as mental health centers and nursing facilities, among others.

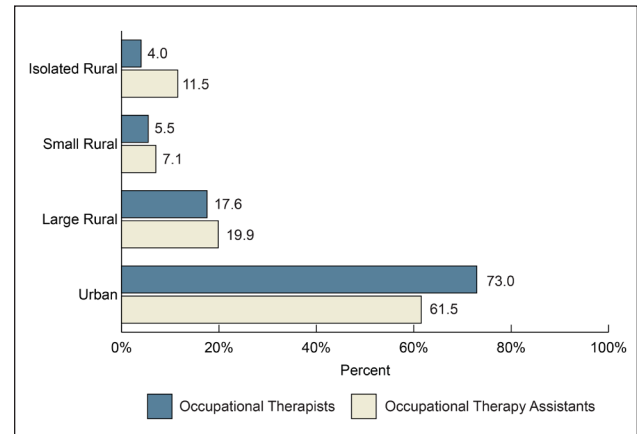
Education and Employment

The NDBOTP licensure data showed that most OTs (n = 491, 70.6%) and OTAs (n = 160, 80.4%) who graduated in North Dakota ended up working in North Dakota. The next largest state employing OT graduates licensed in North Dakota was Minnesota with 6.7% of OTs and 5.3% of OTAs. South Dakota employed 1.1% of OTs, and the remaining individuals practiced in other states such as Montana, Wyoming, California, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Nebraska, and Texas.

Rural-Urban Designation of Primary Workplace for OTs and OTAs in ND

The majority (70.4%) of both OTs and OTAs in North Dakota worked in urban areas. Of the 29.6% that practiced in rural areas, 18.1% worked in large rural areas, 5.8% worked in small rural areas and 5.7% were employed in isolated rural areas. Specific percentages for both OTs and OTAs are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Rural-Urban Designation of Primary Workplace for OTs and OTAs in North Dakota



Conclusions

- There were more than four times as many OTs as OTAs in North Dakota. For example, the ratio between licensed occupational therapists and OTAs was 9.2:2.1 per 10,000.
- While both OTs and OTAs were more likely to practice in urban areas, there were a greater percentage of OTAs working in rural settings than OTs.

Data

North Dakota State Board of Occupational Therapy Practice. (2020). Licensure file. Retrieved from <https://www.ndotboard.com/>.

Occupational Therapy Class of 2019 Graduate Workforce Information. (2019). UND Occupational Therapy Internal Program Data.