Occupational Therapy for MS Patients

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Occupational Therapy Evaluation

- Occupational Therapy evaluates a veteran’s abilities in the following areas:
  - Range of Motion of Arms
  - Upper body Strength
  - Coordination/dexterity in hands
  - Motor planning
  - Sensation
  - Proprioception (sense of position of joints)
  - Visual perceptual skills
  - Cognitive functioning/screen
Role of Occupational Therapy for the Caregivers

- Occupational Therapy works with both veterans and their caregivers in order to maximize safety and independence in the following areas:
  - ADLs (Activities of Daily Living): Bathing, dressing, mobility, transfers, grooming, and eating.
  - IADLS (Instrumental Activities of Daily Living): Managing medications, finances, job tasks, housework, hobbies and leisure activities.
  - Achieving (I) and safety in these areas can be accomplished through a combination of any of the following:
    - Remedial intervention: treatment focused on improving underlying deficit areas. (i.e., increase ROM in order to allow for (I) self care)
    - Compensatory strategies and use of adaptive equipment, assistive technology, durable medical equipment and home modifications.
    - Education of both veteran and caregiver
Remedial Intervention

- With physician approval and referral, OT can provide a customized home exercise program to improve flexibility, balance, range of motion, and strength which can help achieve (I) in ADLs and IADLs.

- It is important for MS patients to not overdo it during exercise program. OT can provide information on intensity and duration for exercises.

- Some MS patients have sensitivity to heat, use caution to avoid overheating during exercise. Suggestions include use of pool for exercise, drink plenty of liquids, and avoid exercising in heat of the day (10am-2pm)

- Some successful exercise programs for MS patients can include water aerobics, swimming, yoga, and tai chi.
Adaptive Equipment for Self Care

- **Bathing/Dressing:** Frequently caregivers provide assistance for bathing and dressing when it may not always be necessary. There are adaptive devices that can allow veterans to accomplish these tasks independently:
  - Long handled bath sponges allow for increased ease in reaching difficult areas during bathing (back, legs, feet).
  - Long handled reachers, sock aides and shoe horns assist in putting on undergarments, pants, socks and shoes during dressing tasks.
  - Button hooks and zipper pulls can help veterans with coats, button shirts, and zippers on jeans/pants.
Durable Equipment for Self Care

- There are multiple options for equipment available which can keep veterans safe in the home during self care tasks:
  - Bedside commodes/Raised toilet seats
  - Shower chairs/shower bench
  - Grab bars for tub/toilet
  - Hoyer lift: allows for safe transfers of veterans that require a lot of physical assistance. (i.e. going bed->wheelchair)
- Occupational therapists can identify the most appropriate devices and provide training in safe transfer techniques to prevent falls.
Education

- OT can provide both veterans and caregivers in various strategies for:
  - Energy Conservation
  - Work simplification
  - Body mechanics/Ergonomics

- These tips can be utilized by both patients and caregivers to avoid fatigue and reduce caregiver burden.
Energy Conservation

- Use high energy times of day to perform labor intensive tasks. For example, if veteran has more energy in morning, then do his bathing during that time.

- Gather needed supplies together in one location in order to avoid unnecessary steps (i.e. group all grooming supplies together on a shelf in the bathroom; all coffee supplies next to coffee machine)

- Shop online for needed items in order to save time and energy in travel (i.e. Peapod for groceries; Amazon for holiday/birthday shopping, etc.)
Work Simplification Strategies

- Prioritize and delegate tasks when necessary (What really needs to get done and at what frequency? Can family or friends assist with some tasks?)
- Use a planner to organize both immediate and future needs in order to avoid unnecessary trips (i.e., buy birthday cards needed later in the month from the store while out getting the immediate need for milk and bread)
- Avoid the need for ironing by taking clothes out of the dryer at the end of the cycle and hang them up.
- Let the dishes air dry in the drainer instead of towel drying them.
Body Mechanics/Ergonomics

- When lifting anything, keep object close to your body and bend with your knees not with your back.
- Patients should transfer towards his/her stronger side (i.e., if pt.'s left side is weak, then place w/c to the pt.'s right side so he can transfer towards that direction).
- Avoid static prolonged positioning during the day. The body is meant to move and needs pressure relief. (Repositioned every 2 hours in the bed; take computer breaks every 20-30 minutes).
- Place small pillow between knees for side sleeping or underneath knees for back sleepers. This helps keep the spine neutral and reduce strain on the lower back.
Approximately one half of MS patients will develop difficulties with cognition. The veteran may have difficulty in remembering information, organizing his/her environment, planning tasks, problem solving, etc.

These difficulties often require caregivers to assist veterans in tasks such as reminders to take medications, remember doctor’s appointments, take a shower, etc.

Use of both low tech and high tech assistive technology can assist both the veteran and caregiver in minimizing need for reminders.
Low Tech and High Tech Devices
“One size does not fit all”

- It is important to match the right level of technology with the person that is going to be using it. A smartphone might not be the best choice for a 70 yo veteran who may struggle with how to negotiate the device. Choosing a small iPod would not be suitable for a veteran with dexterity or vision issues.

- Low tech options include use of sticky notes, wall calendar, and notepad/notebook. Recommend placement of these items in frequently used, well visible areas such as the in the kitchen and bedroom.

- Establishing routine (although not a device) is a big help in remembering daily tasks. Pair needed task with a routine event (i.e., take AM meds with morning coffee if allowed)

- Most people have access to smartphones and apps that will keep track of a multitude of tasks such as medication reminders, calendars. Majority of apps have alarms to provide reminders for both the veteran and caregiver.
VA Resources: High Tech

- MyHealtheVet: Online VA resource for medical management.
  - www.myhealth.va.gov
  - Order medication refills online
  - Contact medical providers via secure messaging once in person authentication is completed. Providers usually respond within 24-72 business hours.
  - Access to key components of VA health record such as medications, labs, appointments, radiology reports, wellness reminders, etc.
  - Use the Track Health feature to keep a log of medical history such as blood sugars, body temperature, blood pressure, weight, heart rate, etc.
  - Access to medical libraries, MedlinePlus and the Veterans Health Library.
Referral Process

- If a caregiver is interested in obtaining Occupational Therapy for their loved one, it is recommended that they discuss it with the Primary Care Physician (PCP) during the veteran’s outpatient appointment or during his/her inpatient admission in the hospital.

- Occupational Therapy services are usually available for inpatient, outpatient, and in home health services. However, access to these services may vary from region to region.

- Patients that need occupational therapy services outside the VA would get a prescription for services from his/her physician.
References

- http://www.nationalmssociety.org
- http://www.msfocus.org
- https://beta.mssociety.ca/