

## Career Profile

### Danielle Medeiros, Occupational Therapy

Many of us are led to a career due to happenstance or coincidental meetings. This is exactly what led Danielle Medeiros to a career in Occupational Therapy following her graduation in 2002 from WLU with a kinesiology degree. Following a guest presentation by an OT in a second year course, it sparked Danielle to explore the profession in further detail. Through her research, Danielle came to believe that OT would complement her interest in the health care sciences (particularly rehabilitation) and support opportunities to work with people in an environment that would provide decent work hours and the flexibility to work independently.



In order to really “try on” OT as a career, Danielle initiated a volunteer placement with a chronic pain management program where she supported both Occupational Therapists and Physiotherapists while serving as a research assistant. In this strategic volunteer role, Danielle was afforded access to a network of professionals that she is still connected to even 5 years later. This volunteer position helped Danielle to gain further clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of an OT and solicit wise words of career advice from people who had already undergone training and job searching in the field.

Immediately following graduation from her OT degree at McMaster University, Danielle found herself working in a large Toronto-based teaching hospital. On a daily basis, Danielle works with injured workers who suffer chronic pain as a result of their injuries. The overall goal of treatment is to improve a client’s functioning in order that they may return to a productive life. Some of Danielle’s day to day tasks include running psychoeducational groups and providing individualized treatment. More specifically, Danielle might coach someone on how to sit at a computer with proper body mechanics or instruct groups of people on energy conservation, body mechanics, how to navigate activities of daily living or stress management to name a few.

Danielle’s role affords her many career advantages such as access to a multidisciplinary team who offers diverse ideas and approaches to health management. Danielle’s employer also provides many career development opportunities such as participation in conferences and courses and the opportunity to teach OT-bound university students at the University of Toronto.

Like any career, OT is not without its own occupational challenges. Danielle notes that health care legislation can change with each new government which can dramatically change the way OTs practice. In addition, OT’s must maintain membership with the Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists (OSOT) which is a rather costly membership to uphold. Although Danielle identifies assisting clients as one of the most enjoyable aspects of her career, it also poses as one of the greatest challenges since the client population with whom she works often has numerous complex problems and funding for services or adaptive equipment is usually very limited.

Based on the diverse array of psychoeducational groups Danielle facilitates (e.g., stress management to energy conservation) it is evident that the approach of an Occupational Therapist is a holistic one that aims to provide treatment that supports not only mind, but body and soul. Recently, Danielle participated in intensive cognitive behavioural therapy training as well as “mindfulness based medication-stress reduction therapy” training that can be incorporated into the many interventions she uses with clients. This broader scope of practice can sometimes lead to confusion to an outsider as to where the role of an OT ends and a social worker begins. Interestingly, current political lobbying by the OSOT is aiming to enable occupational therapy be one of the professions that will be licensed by the government to perform psychotherapy in Ontario. As a result, this could increase the demand for OT services in mental health service settings.

There are many employment contexts for an occupational therapist ranging from hospitals, community organizations or even private practice. If you are looking into a career in OT, like Danielle, seek out volunteer placements that will expose you to the role first-hand and begin conducting informational interviews with people in the field.

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