

AUTHOR ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT

Arena, S. (2018). Health Promotion in Therapy. *Home healthcare now*, 36(1), 53-54.

HHN
NHH-D-17-000
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Authors:

Arena, Sara PT, MS, DScPT
Assistant Professor
Physical Therapy Program
School of Health Science
Oakland University
Rochester MI

Correspondence to:

Arena, Sara PT, MS, DScPT
Assistant Professor
Physical Therapy Program
School of Health Sciences
Oakland University
Human Health Bldg- Room 3152
433 Meadowbrook Road
Rochester, MI 48309-4401

The author(s) declare(s) no conflicts of interest:

Title: Health Promotion in Therapy

Figures: none

Tables: none

Health Promotion in Therapy

Health promotion initiatives are an essential element of a therapy plan of care. The *World Health Organization* defines health promotion as “the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health.” The home healthcare (HHC) setting provides an ideal venue to introduce and reinforce health promoting strategies in a practical way. Specifically, providing care in the context of an individual’s home offers a unique opportunity to address determinants of health inclusive of personal, social, economic, and environmental factors that may not be recognized or evident in a clinic-based setting.

In many practice settings outside the home, physical and occupational therapists (PT, OT), receive a social history based on the patient’s or caregiver’s interpretative recall. This information has potential to be void of relevant detail or be biased to portray a scenario a patient may assume the health care provider wants to hear. However, HHC therapists have the distinct advantage of being present in a patient’s living space; thereby, grasping real time valid and reliable assessments of an individual’s contemporary determinants of health. For example, when conducting a HHC assessment of a patient who verbally reports they are receiving adequate nutrition, a therapist may discover various barriers to adequate nutritional support. This may include cross-discipline assessments of in home food availability or unhealthy food options or a specific discipline focused assessments including environmental and/or functional limitations that could prevent shopping for food or preparing a complete meal. Morris et al. (2009) suggest poor nutrition can lead to pathology and negatively influence recovery from movement dysfunction; therefore, adequate nutrition is one example of a health promoting variable that may impact the attainment of therapy outcomes.

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Incorporation of health promotion strategies into a therapist's daily practice is supported by both the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) and the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA). The APTA's position statement advocates for the profession of physical therapy to be experts in rehabilitation and habilitation and to help individuals and populations improve overall health and prevent the need for avoidable health care services (American Physical Therapy Association's, HOD-P06-16-06-05). The APTA further asserts that PTs are uniquely educated and trained to adapt health care recommendations to the community environment where individuals live, work, learn, and play. A similar position is held by the AOTA and encourages OTs to "Teach strategies to incorporate healthy habits and routines into daily activities for clients of all ages and abilities".

Frerichs et al. (2012) provides evidence that PTs can be effective health counselors, specifically with respect to lifestyle behavior change. However, to fully understand the depth and impact therapists can have on health promotion, Bezner (2015) has provided a basis for understanding health promotion terminology, identifying the knowledge and skills therapists require to address health promoting behaviors, and discussing barriers and opportunities associated with integrating the promotion of health and wellness into practice. While there are numerous areas in which a therapist can promote health, Bezner suggests PTs are well positioned to address the topics of physical activity, nutrition, smoking cessation, sleep, and stress management with the patients and clients they encounter. Furthermore, the AOTA provides its members resources including fact sheets aimed at *The Role of Occupational Therapy with Health Promotion* and *Occupational Therapy's Role in Sleep*.

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Utilization of assessments inclusive of biometric measures, timed or graded exercise tests, motivational interviewing, and psychosocial and behavioral risk and wellness assessments during a HHC episode of care may be beneficial to identify health promotion needs. The assessment findings may further guide a PT or OT toward targeted health promotion strategies toward primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. Mindful documentation to justify medical necessity and skilled therapy services should be considered when documenting health promotion interventions. While a therapist may anecdotally recognize an intervention strategy was of benefit to an individual, the associated documentation should communicate the story of how and why the health promoting intervention required the skill of the therapist and specifically how it aided in the attainment of an established goal or outcome measure.

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