

**Episode: 1****Title: What is “Occupation”?****Hosts: Mahek Bansal & Larissa Ferrari****Transcript:****Larissa Ferrari**

Welcome to our very first episode of the New Possibilities podcast. We are so excited to be starting this journey with you all.

**Mahek Bansal**

For our very first episode, we chose to start at the foundation of OT, and that is talking about what OT is some misconceptions defining the scope of OT generally, but then also specifically in relation to Paeds.

**Larissa Ferrari**

So let's start by talking about our definition of OT. Mahek, why don't you start?

**Mahek Bansal**

So for me, my definition of OT is that occupational therapy supports people of all ages to engage in their roles, occupations, and tasks that they want to do and need to do in their lives. What about you, Larissa?

**Larissa Ferrari**

Of course, not a lot different, but to me, occupational therapy helps people with anything related to the things they need or want to do in their life. The occupations need to be meaningful, either for the person who performs the occupation or at least as a meaningful way to participate in society.

**Mahek Bansal**

So what about the definition from the occupational therapy of Australia?

**Larissa Ferrari**

So OTA definition of OT is that OTs are qualified health professionals who work with all people to do the things they need and want to do in all aspects of life, such as taking care of oneself and others, working, volunteering, and participating in hobbies interests and social events. Occupational therapists call these activities occupations.

**Mahek Bansal**

So between all of our definitions, yours, mine and OTAs, there's lots of similarities. Things like focusing on what they need or want to do, all ages, all aspects of life. So that's really nice to hear that we're all sort of on the same page about what we do.

**Larissa Ferrari**

Exactly. But it's also interesting because there's a lot of misconceptions when we talk about occupation and OTs. So I'm curious to know about you. Have you got any story about misconception?

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I guess for me, when I tell people that I am an occupational therapist, and specifically an occupational therapist working with children, a lot of people are thinking or sometimes say the question, well, kids don't really work, so what do you do with them? And I think the misconception there is that occupation as a term. Often, we use it in relation to what you do as a job or like your productivity. So, for example, when you're arriving in Australia on the plane, and you have to fill in your declaration form and it has what's your occupation? That's asking you what is your job? So I think that brings a big misconception that occupational and therapists work in relation to productivity and what people do for a living, which some OTs do, but that's only one area of practice within a much bigger scope. What about you, Larissa?

**Mahek Bansal**

Do you have any misconceptions?

**Larissa Ferrari**

We do, actually. I'm from Brazil, so this is a very common misconception for us as well in Brazil. But another one is that the word occupation in Brazil is very misused if that makes sense. People think that “occupy yourself” means to do something, to use your time to do something regardless of meaning. Therefore they think occupational therapy is just getting people to do things randomly without any meaning, without any need involved or wants, if that makes sense. So this is a very big misconception.

**Mahek Bansal**

So it's basically taking out that meaningfulness out of what we do as occupational therapists. It doesn't matter if you are motivated by it or you care about doing it's like you have to occupy your time so go do something.

**Larissa Ferrari**

Exactly, that's it. Which can be tricky because it takes away what's the reason behind the profession. So it's very important for us to make clear of what occupation is so then we can help them to make sense of the importance of this profession.

**Mahek Bansal**

Yeah, and I think that links in really well into our next sort of discussion point around if these are the misconception, then why is it important to define the scope of occupational therapists?

**Larissa Ferrari**

I guess the first thing it would be to define for our clients and the families we work with. So then we support them to understand what our role is and how we can help them. This understanding will provide them with a foundation to then be able to set appropriate goals and guide the OT process. So to partnership with us to advocate for themselves to understand what we do and therefore how we can set up goals together as a team. But I guess there's some more. What else would you say about this?

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Well, I think it's also important for other health professionals. I guess other professionals would need to know why a client would benefit from OT so that they can refer to OT when they need, I guess, improving their awareness of what we do and how we support clients. We can also work alongside each other and work together on common goals. So if we take an example of a child that wants to participate in a team sport, but it's become a little bit tricky. And so a parent or a family is trying to seek some support around that, depending on what areas of that, I guess function would depend on which health professionals are best suited to support them. And you can't choose the right health professional without understanding a health professional's scope. So in this example you might observe that the child has some motor difficulties and then that might need a physiotherapist. Difficulties with understanding the different instructions or they're communicating with their teammates, might need a speech and language pathologist, things like taking turns sharing with others or maintaining attention in a group environment might need an OT.

**Mahek Bansal**

And that way we have a team of therapists working on a common goal but in their own scope. But in order to do that we need to know their scope.

**Mahek Bansal**

What about you, Larissa? Is there anything else that you think?

**Larissa Ferrari**

I guess it's also very important for the community to know what we do as an occupational therapist, because then by sharing understanding of what OT is and what OTAs do, people can make better choices and they can seek support from the most suitable avenues. So OT is still an emerging profession and it's hard for people to know what we do and understand when they need this type of support. So if it's clear to the wider community what we do, therefore they can identify some areas of concerns and seek for help straight away. And that's huge. That's important.

**Mahek Bansal**

Definitely. And I think as OTs, of course I hope we do, but we're likely to know what our own scope is. So it's not about us necessarily learning our scope, but it's important that we realize how beneficial it is that we're taking time to explain our scope to others and to advocate for our profession. Because not only does that help us, it helps our clients, other health professionals, the community, everyone benefits.

**Larissa Ferrari**

And talking about this, I feel like it's even harder to explain what we do in the pediatric population. I think as adults we forget how hard it is to learn new things. And kids are always engaged in learning a new skill or at least trying new things, going to new environments. So they go from the home environment to childcare to playgrounds. They go from being a very self-centred baby to being a very social child. So there's so much learning involved, so many new things to be learned, then it's quite complex when it comes to pediatric. Do you agree, Mahek?

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Definitely. And I think that the learning new activities also makes it hard for parents to understand what is age appropriate and what they should expect from their child to then know when's an appropriate time to seek support. If their child is always meant to be learning new things, always meant to be developing, then is it okay that they still don't know how to properly tie their shoelaces or is it a little bit later? And now it's really impacting their overall independence. And so I need a little bit of support. And with kids constantly learning, it's hard to know when's the right time to take that next step. So I think it just makes it more and more complex, not only for the child, not only for us, but for parents and families and everyone.

**Larissa Ferrari**

And we have to also consider the fact that when we work with paediatrics, we are working with a child as a whole. Not that other areas of OT doesn't think or believe or look to the clients in that way, but they can work in very specific settings like hand therapy, mental health. But when we're working with children, there's no such a thing as working with motor planning issues or executive functioning issues or mental health issues. They're all together. So it's very broad, don't you agree?

**Mahek Bansal**

And it's like we have to be a jack of all trades, right? Like where you said, OT and mental health with adults might be working on motivation and engaging in meaningful activities. Or an OT working in an inpatient rehab setting, again, with adults might be working on specific self-care things like showering and dressing and using cutlery, ready to go back home. Whereas with kids, we're doing all of those things altogether, just with kids. And so it provides a lot of variety and diversity and really gives us a challenge, which is one of the main reasons I love our job. But it's really complex. And for kids, it's really complex because we're expecting so much out of them. And I guess a lot of the things that we're expecting may not necessarily be things that they want to do.

**Larissa Ferrari**

True. They also have to do a lot of things that it's not part of their choice, but it is part of being part of the society, as we said before. So that can add even more challenge to the complexity of the situation.

**Mahek Bansal**

But I guess we're always up for a challenge, aren't we, Larissa?

**Larissa Ferrari**

We love a challenge. And also, that's why we've got this new challenge. So, please, if you like that podcast, if you like that topic, or if you want to add anything, share, send a message, contact us, send your opinion.

**Mahek Bansal**

And I guess we've been talking a lot about sharing what we do as OTs and what OT means and our scope. And a great way to share it might be sharing this podcast to some people,

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you know, that think you think might benefit from learning a little bit more about our profession. And also, we'd love to hear any of your funny stories about misconceptions when you've told people that you're an OT or misconceptions about OT.

**Larissa Ferrari**

Oh, yes, we should do an episode about misconception stories.

**Mahek Bansal**

I'm sure it'd take up the whole episode. We'd have lots to talk about. But thank you so much for listening, and we can't wait to be with you again on our next episode. Bye.