



Ontario Society of
Occupational Therapists

Personhood in Acute Care Occupational Therapy Tip Sheet



2025

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Introduction

Personhood, defined in medical ethics as “the uniqueness of people, their individuality and sense of stability as beings that are irreplaceable” (Young, 2019), is a key cornerstone of person-centered care in occupational therapy practice.

This resource provides tips and strategies to consider when integrating personhood into the acute care occupational therapy practice process.

Thank you to the OSOT Hospital Sector Team for putting together this resource to support our members.

Do you have more tips and strategies to share? [Contact us.](#)



Assessment and Goal Setting

Consider using:

- **Life Narratives:** Completing a holistic initial assessment, which involves a focus on life narratives and understanding a patient's specific life history, values, personal strengths, and occupational roles (Goldstein et al., 2004), allows you, as the occupational therapist (OT), to develop a therapeutic intervention which focuses on the core concepts of a person's identity.
- **Structured Goal Setting Templates:** Understanding a patient's personhood and translating their roles and occupations to therapeutic interventions, allows them to find meaning in their therapy sessions. This may be done in a non-structured interview format due to the fast-paced nature of acute care, or through structured goal-setting templates, such as the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM), which promote person-centered decision making.



Intervention

For addressing:

- **Behaviour Management:** The occupational therapist may provide supportive care to patients with responsive behaviours secondary to dementia. Through understanding a patient’s personhood, a therapist can assist in identifying the causes of responsive behaviours, and provide strategies to decrease their occurrence through non-pharmacological interventions (Behavioural Supports Ontario, n.d). Consider utilizing a “Get to Know Me” template with patients with memory concerns, to allow staff to better understand their interests and valued occupational roles. Explore North East Behavioural Supports Ontario – Regional BSO Office’s template resource ([My Personhood Summary© | brainXchange](#))
- **Motivation and Self-Concept:** It is beneficial for occupational therapists to develop interventions that are embedded in an individual’s personhood. For example, a therapist may have a patient practice functional ambulation, as a means to return to walking their dog at discharge. Interventions being framed in a meaningful way may increase patients' motivation to participate in the therapeutic process and work to redevelop a sense of self post-illness/injury.
- **Environmental Changes:** Co-create an environment that is comforting and personal for the patient. This may be done by having the patient place meaningful items and photos around the room.

Interdisciplinary and Care Partner Communication

- **Prioritize Care Team Involvement:** Encourage appropriate staff to be involved in the patient's care to consider all aspects and barriers to their recovery. It may also be beneficial to prioritize frequent interdisciplinary rounds to optimize team communication and keep the patient's goals at the centre of the care plan.
- **Involve Key Interested Parties:** If possible, plan for and support the patient to have people important to them involved in key discussions and decision making, so they feel supported, and their key interested parties feel valued in the decision-making process.



Discharge Planning

- **Re-Establishing Occupational Identity:** The OT may assist the patient in adjusting to changes in identity that have been brought on by illness or injury. It is important to address how they can continue to participate in their meaningful life roles and occupations at discharge from occupational therapy services (Ellis-Hill, 2011).
- **Handover of Care to Community Care Partners:** Ensure the patient has access to support and services to continue to participate in self-identified meaningful occupations following discharge from the acute care service.



References

Ellis-Hill, C. (2011). "Identity and sense of self: the significance of personhood in rehabilitation." Journal of the Australasian Rehabilitation Nurses' Association, vol. 14, no. 1, 2011.

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[Making Connections: Recommendations to Enhance the use of Personhood Tools to Improve Person-Centere | brainXchange](#)