

Dance/Movement Therapists



Occupational Brief Title Codes:

- D.O.T.: 076.127-018
- G.O.E.: 10.02.02
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- H.O.C.: ASI

Work Classification Based Related

D.O.T. Occupations:

- Art Therapists
- Audiologists
- Music Therapists
- Speech Pathologists

Interests Based Related

G.O.E. Occupations:

- Orientation and Mobility Therapists for the Blind
- Physical Instructors
- Psychiatric Technicians
- Recreational Therapists

Skills Based Related

O*NET Occupations:

- Child, Family, and School Social Workers
- Counselors
- Occupational Therapists
- Physical Therapists

Noteworthy Quote:

“Dance/movement therapists draw on the rich traditions of the creative arts in healing, as well as modern best practices in counseling and expressive therapies. There’s nothing like being in the scene helping someone move through personal roadblocks to affirm the power of human transformation through motion.”

–Eric B. Miller, President, Expressive Therapy Concepts, Phoenixville, Pennsylvania

Dance/movement therapists (ˈdance ˈther-a-pists) use dance and movement as a form of psychotherapy to treat and rehabilitate persons with mental, emotional, or physical difficulties. They integrate a dancer’s special knowledge of body, movement, and expressive spirit with the healing skills of counseling, psychotherapy, and rehabilitation.

Dance/movement therapy is used to help people with cognitive, social, emotional, or physical disorders. In this type of therapy, movement is used as a mechanism to further the physical and emotional well-being of individuals. It provides people, with special needs, ways to express themselves that may not be possible through more traditional therapies. It often results in a decrease in overall anger, anxiety, and depression. It helps people explore their feelings, increase their self-awareness, and learn effective ways of expressing themselves.

Dance/movement therapists work with all kinds of people in many different settings. Some work with emotionally disturbed children or adults in psychiatric hospitals. Others work with elderly persons in nursing homes and geriatric treatment programs. They may work with individuals with spinal cord injuries and other physical illnesses or disabilities, or clients who just have never felt quite at home in their own bodies. They also work in holistic or alternative medical treatment centers, counseling centers, and community centers.

Work Performed

Dance/movement therapists are sometimes referred to as **dance therapists** or **movement therapists**. Generally, however, the titles are combined into dance/movement therapists. These professionals also fall in the Federal Civil Service Classification of **creative arts therapists**, which includes art, dance, music, and psychodrama therapy professionals. Dance/movement therapists use dance,



Dance/movement therapists use dance and movement as a form of psychotherapy to treat and rehabilitate persons with mental, emotional, or physical difficulties. Photo by Amy Elliott

movement, and other creative processes as an effective treatment for people with developmental, medical, social, physical, and psychological impairments.

Dance/movement therapists use dance and movement to foster health, communication, and expression; promote the integration of physical, emotional, cognitive, and social functioning; enhance self-awareness; and facilitate change. Like other therapists, they focus on helping their clients develop effective communication skills and relationships; gain insight into patterns of behavior; and create new options for coping with problems. They help their clients improve self-esteem and body image, and expand their movement vocabulary.

The first step in any dance/movement therapy program is to observe and assess the patient. Dance/movement therapists look over the client's information obtained from medical records, standardized assessments, observations, the medical staff, and the clients themselves. Dance/movement therapists may also work with physicians, nurses, psychologists, social workers, teachers, and, under certain conditions, the patient's family to determine the patient's needs and to develop a treatment plan.

Dance/movement therapists also gather a lot of information about clients by observing how clients move. People often express how they feel through their posture, gestures, and demeanor. Dance/movement therapists may describe and assess individual movement patterns using a special system of written notation called Laban Movement Analysis. If the clients agree, therapists may also videotape them.

Dance/movement therapists use this analysis and other information to develop and carry out therapeutic treatment plans for clients. Treatment plans are designed specifically for each client based on his or her individual needs and interests. Dance/movement therapists then direct movement activities in therapy sessions, drawing on a broad range of techniques. They use spontaneous or other dance forms, and may use props, music, and stress reduction techniques.

Dance/movement therapists help clients use their bodily-felt experience to express their thoughts and feelings. They help clients learn to use their bodies to develop emotional themes. Therapists may also encourage the use of imagery and visualization. For instance, a therapist may suggest that a withdrawn child try to move like a bird or a butterfly, or suggest that a patient reenact a significant life experience.

Dance/movement therapists can adapt their methods to suit many different kinds of people and circumstances. In acute healthcare settings, such as hospitals and rehabilitation centers, dance/movement therapists treat and rehabilitate individuals with specific health conditions. In such settings, they usually work in conjunction or collaboration with physicians, nurses, psychologists, social workers, and physical and occupational therapists.

In long-term and residential care facilities, they use dance and movement activities, especially structured group programs, to improve and maintain their clients' general health and well-being. They may also provide interventions to prevent a client from suffering further medical problems and complications related to their illness or disability.

In addition, dance/movement therapists may work in community-based settings, such as special-education programs for school districts. Those who work in schools help counselors, teachers, and parents address the special needs of students, including easing disabled students' transition into adult life. Others work in programs and facilities for adults with special needs, such as assisted-living, adult daycare, and substance abuse rehabilitation centers. In these programs, they use interventions to develop specific skills, while providing opportunities for exercise, mental stimulation, creativity, and fun.

Dance/movement therapists help clients enjoy greater independence, and reduce or eliminate the effects of their illness, disability, or other difficulty. The use of movement as therapy is especially effective with individuals who cannot benefit from verbal therapy alone. Dance/movement therapists are a valuable resource in the treatment of autistic children, traumatized patients, individuals with a negative body image, those with a speech or hearing impairment, and individuals with emotional difficulties.

Dance/movement therapists work in a variety of therapy formats including individual, couples, family, and group therapy sessions. Group sessions may begin with warm-up exercises and progress to more focused movements that center on an issue or a problem. Sessions may conclude with relaxation exercises and follow-up discussions in which members share memories, feelings, and experiences. Group sessions can be especially effective with prison inmates, AIDS patients, veterans, and substance abusers. Residents of nursing homes also find relief from loneliness and isolation through participation in group therapy.

In addition to clinical practice, dance/movement therapists also work in other areas of the field. Some may have supervisory and management duties. They may act as consultants, engage in research, or teach.

Working Conditions

Dance/movement therapists may conduct therapy sessions in the community room of a hospital, in a school gym, or in a classroom. Those in private practice often have their own studios or rent studios where they see clients and lead therapy sessions. Many also have office space to plan treatment programs, prepare documentation, and consult with clients. They may have a separate office or have to share space with other workers. Those who write, conduct research, or lecture may travel extensively to conduct workshops or deliver lectures.

Their work can be physically and emotionally demanding. Dance/movement therapists must be able to create and improvise different movements, as well as mirror or reflect the way a client moves. Dance/movement therapists have closer physical contact with their clients than do therapists who use more verbal type therapies.

Hours and Earnings

Dance/movement therapists usually work forty hours a week, but some work part-time. Dance/movement therapists may work at several locations. They often work overtime

and may be on-call for emergencies after hours and on weekends. Those with a private practice often work late afternoons or evenings.

Earnings vary with education, credentials, experience, skills, job duties, employer, and geographic location. Teachers, administrators, and those who do research and consulting usually earn the highest salaries. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average salary for recreational therapists, including dance/movement therapists, was \$34,280 a year in 2004. However, average earnings for dance/movement therapists were generally higher because entry into the profession requires a higher level of education than recreational therapy. The average earnings of dance/movement therapists generally ranged closer to \$40-50,000 a year, with some earning \$60-70,000 a year or more.

Fringe benefits for these workers may include life and health insurance, pension plans, paid holidays, paid vacations, and paid sick days. Some dance/movement therapists also receive reimbursement for continuing education seminars and advanced course work. Part-time workers and those with a private practice arrange for and pay the costs of their own fringe benefits.

Education and Training

Professional training for this career is on the graduate level. High school students should take courses which prepare them for college, including English, mathematics, social and physical sciences, health, and drama. Individuals interested in this career should also study a broad range of dance forms and styles, including ethnic, folk, jazz, modern, and classical. Courses in improvisation and choreography are important. Experience teaching dance to groups is especially valuable, as is part-time or volunteer work with people in a human service setting.

Dance/movement therapists usually begin their professional studies with a bachelor's degree in liberal arts and/or dance. Undergraduate studies should include liberal arts courses with an emphasis on psychology, dance, dance theory, and kinesiology. Most dance/movement therapists then complete a master's degree program in dance therapy approved by the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA). Students may also obtain a master's degree in a related field, provided they complete specific dance/movement therapy courses and a supervised internship.

Approved master's degree programs in dance therapy include human development, research skills, and the theory and practice of dance therapy. Students study human anatomy, physiology, abnormal psychology, medical and psychiatric terminology, characteristics of illnesses and disabilities, and the use of assistive devices and technologies. They take courses in observation and assessment, treatment and program planning, intervention design, evaluation, and professional ethics. Students also complete fieldwork and a six- to nine-month internship in a clinical setting.

Licensing, Registration and Professional Societies

Like other therapy and counseling services, most states have regulations regarding the practice of dance/movement

therapy. Wisconsin has a specific license for dance/movement therapy; and New York has a license for creative arts therapy. Most other states allow dance/movement therapists to be licensed as professional counselors. Some of these workers also hold licenses in related professions, such as clinical psychology or social work. These credentials help make dance therapy services reimbursable under most health insurance plans.

In addition, most employers prefer to hire candidates who are registered by the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA). As the primary professional organization for dance/movement therapists, ADTA works to establish and maintain high standards of professional dance therapy training, education, and practice. It offers professional and technical support, and numerous educational and networking opportunities, including an annual conference and support of publications, conferences, seminars, workshops, and meetings throughout the year.

As noted before, ADTA also maintains a registry of dance/movement therapists who have met stringent standards of education and experience. To qualify for the title Dance Therapist Registered (DTR), candidates must graduate from an ADTA-approved master's program which includes 700 hours of supervised clinical experience. To qualify for the advanced level of registry and the title of Academy of Dance Therapists Registered (ADTR), candidates must hold the DTR title and have 3,640 additional hours of supervised employment in the field. This credential qualifies therapists to teach, supervise others, and maintain a private practice. To maintain the ADTR title, dance/movement therapists must complete 100 hours of continuing education every five years.

Dance/movement therapists may also belong to other organizations which support their work. Examples include the National Coalition of Creative Arts Therapies Associations (NCCATA); American Counseling Association (ACA); and the American Psychological Association (APA).

Personal Qualifications

Dance/movement therapists need not be professional performers, but they should know a broad range of expressive physical movements. Good physical coordination is also necessary to demonstrate or participate in activities. They should be perceptive, creative, and intelligent, and should have good listening skills and sound judgment.

The work requires empathy, compassion, and a sincere desire to help people. They should be comfortable working with persons who are ill or have disabilities. They must be patient, tactful, and persuasive when working with people who have a variety of special needs. Ingenuity, a sense of humor, and imagination are needed to adapt activities to individual needs.

Occupations can be adapted for workers with disabilities. Persons should contact their school or employment counselors, their state office of vocational rehabilitation, or their state department of labor to explore fully their individual needs and requirements as well as the requirements of the occupation.

Where Employed

Dance/movement therapists work throughout the United States in a variety of mental health, illness prevention, and community and welfare settings. Most dance/movement therapists work in psychiatric hospitals and community mental health centers. They may work at correctional facilities, medical facilities, child development centers, schools, nursing homes, wellness and alternative healthcare centers, drug treatment centers, rehabilitation centers, crisis centers, or counseling centers. Some work in or own a private practice and receive insurance reimbursement. Dance/movement therapists may also conduct sessions in more than one location. They may work with clients at a rehabilitation center one day and may meet with teachers in a high school the next day.

Employment Outlook

Dance therapy is a small but growing field. The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that employment for dance/movement and other creative arts therapists will increase slowly but steadily through the year 2012. Many additional positions will also open due to replacement needs.

Strong employment growth is expected in residential and outpatient settings that serve disabled persons, the elderly, or those diagnosed with mental retardation, mental illness, or substance abuse problems. As residential and outpatient care centers expand to serve greater numbers of elderly people and other individuals with special needs, the demand for dance/movement therapists will continue to increase.

The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act will also create jobs for dance/movement therapists. This legislation requires that schools offer students with disabilities services that will enhance their education, such as dance therapy. However, as more services are being shifted to outpatient settings, employment in hospitals is expected to decline. Overall, opportunities will be best for registered dance/movement therapists with a master's degree in dance therapy.

Entry Methods

Graduates with a master's degree can get help finding a job through their college career services office. Internships and fieldwork often supply solid job leads. Professional organizations often maintain lists of job openings. Networking is also an effective job-search technique, especially among health professionals. By talking with other dance/movement therapists or professionals in related health fields, those looking for jobs can learn about potential employers and current openings.

Advancement

Experienced dance/movement therapists may advance to supervisory or administrative work. Some therapists concentrate on a specialty, such as therapy for pain or addiction. Dance/movement therapists may open a private practice or join together to establish a dance therapy center, where they develop programs to meet the needs of the contracting

agencies and organizations. They may go into teaching, research, or consulting. Dance/movement therapists may also continue their education and earn a doctorate in a related field, which may qualify them for administrative jobs and higher salaries in academic and research fields.

For Further Research

American Counseling Association, 5999 Stevenson Ave., Alexandria, VA 22304. Web site: www.counseling.org

American Dance Therapy Association, 2000 Century Plaza, Suite 108, 10632 Little Patuxent Parkway, Columbia, MD 21044. Web site: www.adta.org

Acknowledgments

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