

## **Darnall Occupational Therapists help Soldiers help themselves after injury**

By Patricia Deal, CRDAMC Public Affairs

Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center's Occupational Therapy Clinic is sponsoring an Open House at the hospital April 12 to promote awareness about how occupational therapists help patients "Live Life to Its Fullest" after an illness or injury.



Figure 1

April has been designated as Occupational Therapy Month to recognize the valuable contributions and achievements the profession has made throughout history to improve the quality of life for millions of people.

Occupational therapists (OTs) date back to World War I where they served as reconstruction aides. Today,

Army OTs work on the front lines of combat and in military hospitals throughout the world helping Soldiers learn to care for themselves after an injury.

Despite its long history, many people may be unfamiliar with the specific treatment and services offered by occupational therapy, and often confuse it with physical therapy.

Maj. Lorie Fike, chief of CRDAMC's OT clinic said there is a clear distinction between the two professions. She explained, "Physical therapy helps patients recover normal range of motion and control after injury or surgery. Occupational therapy goes beyond that and focuses on improving the patient's functional abilities. We help them return to normal functioning, where they are able to do all the life skills they were able to do before their injury or surgery."



Figure 2

Functional activity can be anything from performing specific job tasks, typical personal hygiene activities or sports and other leisure activities.

"Some injuries can be debilitating for the Soldiers. We want to help them recover and regain as much independence as possible," Fike added. "It's so rewarding to be able to help Soldiers regain the ability to perform simple things like brushing their teeth or feeding themselves so they don't have to rely on someone to take care of them."

The therapists at CRDAMC's OT clinic primarily work on upper extremities such as hands, wrists and elbows. They normally see injuries from sports activities or training accidents. They help Soldiers recover from common injuries such as finger fractures, overuse (tendinitis) and nerve compression (carpal tunnel). They also perform post-operative care for any elbow and wrist surgery.

“We have a variety of treatment options, depending on the injury. We look at the best way to return functionality, which may mean looking at different positioning or lifting techniques,” Fike said. “The purpose is to go beyond the problem(s) and find the solutions that help a client live life to the fullest.”



Figure 3

Currently the clinic handles approximately 900 to 1,100 cases a month. Fike said they currently see only active-duty Soldiers but hope to see family members in the future.

Occupational Therapy Month coincides with the Army

Medical Specialist Corps 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary on April 16. Occupational therapists, physical therapists, physician assistants, and dietitians comprise the Corps whose mission is to return Soldiers to duty and/or their optimal level of function.

The Occupational Therapy Open House will be April 12 from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the clinic, first floor of the hospital.

CUTLINES:

**Figure 1**

Major Lorie Fike, chief of the CRDAMC Occupational Therapy Clinic, helps Staff Sgt. Douglas Sharper, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, with the clinic's functional rehabilitation system as part of his treatment after surgery for his broken wrist. The steering wheel is one of several attachments to the system to simulate motion of real-life activities and tasks to help patients with arm, elbow or wrist injuries improve functionality. (U.S. Army photo by Patricia Deal, CRDAMC Public Affairs)

**Figure 2**

First Lt. John McNamara, 48<sup>th</sup> Chemical Brigade, stacks plastic cones as part of his treatment at the CRDAMC Occupational Therapy Clinic for an upper arm injury. Staff Sgt. Ryan Lahr, non-commissioned officer in charge of the clinic, monitors McNamara's progress. (U.S. Army photo by Patricia Deal, CRDAMC Public Affairs)

**Figure 3**

Richard Maywood, a retired first sergeant, and 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Rebekah Lair, 3rd Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, play a game of ping pong as part of their treatment at the CRDAMC Occupational Therapy Clinic for their arm injuries. Captain Bernice Sandelin (center), occupational therapist, says the game is ideal to help Maywood and Lair increase their range of motion and functional movement in their arms, while having fun. (U.S. Army photo by Patricia Deal, CRDAMC Public Affairs)