

Name of Professional: Alice Petranek

Profession: Occupational Therapy

Company: Aviator Home Health

Date of Interview: January 19, 2018

Assessment:

Be a Cheerleader

Through numerous discussions with professionals, I have come to understand that the common denominator among successful Occupational Therapy work is to be a cheerleader; The therapist must be the patient's biggest fan and never give up on their potential to be the most they can be. After speaking with Alice Petranek, I confirmed this understanding among several others, including the differences between the therapy experience among the age groups, and the essential personal connection that exists between the therapist and the patient.

Primarily, the most essential quality for an Occupational Therapist is the ability to never give up hope on a person who has so little hope of their own. For instance, one of Petranek's patients, an elderly woman, believed for a long time that she would never be able to improve. She is seventy years old and has suffered renal failure and diabetes that cost her her left leg. Older people naturally lose strength as they age, so her conditions make her everyday functions especially difficult. Petranek has consistently used encouraging therapeutic techniques to help improve both her mindset and her quality of life. For instance, the woman has built up enough strength to push her wheelchair over thresholds, raised surfaces within doorways. Regarding her mental state, she has always loved to organize things but is not able to see color contrasts accurately. Petranek has

helped her to change the color or things in her home so that she can use them more easily, leading to her improved state of mind. From this, I have taken away the notion that work in the field of OT will require constant support and encouragement but can be incredibly rewarding when a patient finally makes progress.

Second, the interview has allowed me to develop a more detailed understanding of the differences in experiences between age groups. Petranek mainly works with older people, fifty years of age and up, but recognizes that children often receive their therapy in a school setting rather than an office or home setting. The setting is essential to the effectiveness of therapy because since children generally have shorter and weaker attention spans, an environment full of distractions can be detrimental to success in therapy. This is why a school setting with a focused therapist is the most effective setting for children, considering that in a home or office setting, they will not take the activities as seriously and will be more distracted. Also, the therapy experience differs between younger and older people in that older people often have the fixed mindset where they believe they will never be able to improve their lives with a permanent disability. Petranek adds to this the idea that children have not lived a full life yet and therefore have a skewed outlook on their lifelong purpose and goals. However, this knowledge has helped me to come to the conclusion that although their attention span and level of focus may be a challenge, working with children would be more rewarding for me personally because I would be able to construct their foundational life skills that will affect their perception forever.

Finally, there must be a close personal connection between the therapist and the patient in order for the therapy to have the greatest effect. For instance, Petranek works in home health, meaning that she goes to the patients' houses and works one-on-one with

them in that familiar setting. This allows her to more intimately understand their personal challenges because rather than rely on them telling her their problems, she is able to see the problems with her own eyes and therefore more effectively address them. As mentioned earlier, one of Petranek's patients enjoys organizing things, but has trouble seeing contrasting colors. Because of her home health setting, Petranek was able to get her new plates and dishware of different contrasting colors in order for the woman to be able to organize them more easily. This breakthrough could have only been achieved through the close personal connection that takes place in the home health setting. Therefore, building an emotional and unconditionally understanding relationship with the patient is essential for any successful Occupational Therapist.

From this interview with Alice Petranek, I have greatly enhanced my understanding of multiple topics related to my field of study. I have become more aware of the differences of responsibilities between patients of varying ages. I have also confirmed the fundamental notion that the most important element of success between a therapist and their patient is that the therapist is a "cheerleader" and is constantly encouraging by nature.

Interview Notes:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t-djWUJltdl_uPBpIhxl4rQD7e6Wg5F8/view?usp=sharing