

## OT Month

For more than a century, occupational therapists have been helping injured, ill or disabled patients regain their independence and return to their everyday activities.

What started as a way to treat American soldiers who were returning home at the end of World War I has evolved into a way to nurse ordinary citizens back to good health, in their quest to return to a normal lifestyle.

The American Occupational Therapy Association was founded in 1917, and the profession of occupational therapy was officially named in 1921. From coast to coast since 1980, each April is observed as Occupational Therapy Month. April was chosen because it corresponds with AOTA's annual conference and exposition.

Holly Moore, Occupational Therapist at Lawrence County Memorial Hospital, says an occupation is simply "everything you do daily." That includes the simplest things, such as brushing your teeth, combing your hair, getting dressed and going to the bathroom.

"All the basics that we take for granted, until we're sick, are considered occupations," she said. "An occupational therapist helps you address the basics so you can go back home and live."

A Bridgeport native and a graduate of Red Hill High School, Moore has worked in occupational therapy for about a dozen years, including the last five at LCMH. She has a bachelor's degree, as well as a master's, in occupational therapy, after first earning a degree in small business management. In a typical week at the hospital, she'll visit twice with approximately 20 patients.

"I like helping people being able to live their best lives," Moore said. "It feels really good to see someone progress and get well."

Her patients range from "school-aged children to geriatrics," and she works with people who have suffered anything from a sports injury to a stroke.

"In a rural community I get to see a lot of things and I feel blessed," Moore said. "In a larger city you have to specialize. You'd only work with hands or shoulders, or only work in a burn unit or with geriatrics. Here I get to do it all and it's nice to know you've helped people get back to what they want to do."

The recovering patients are sometimes frustrated, Moore says, because they're not satisfied with the rate of progression. The most difficult part, she says, is when the patient realizes that a full return to a normal state of health isn't in the cards.

"It's hard to look at someone you really care about and say, 'Really, this is as good as it's going to get,'" she said.

On the other hand, she takes satisfaction in going the extra mile.

"I'm not one to say, 'OK, your four weeks are done,'" she said. "You always want to find a way to stick it out a little longer."

Moore says the technological advances in the field since she joined 12 years ago have been amazing, and she expects that to continue at a rapid rate.

"Like everything else, I think (occupational therapy) is going to continue to grow," she said. "Technology is going to be a big part of that. In that regard, I really look forward to seeing what the future holds."

Moore can be reached for consultation by contacting the hospital at 618-943-1000.