

# HERALD TRAINING

## Therapists get patients' lives working

**T**O AN occupational therapist the term "occupation" means more than a job. It is all meaningful activity a person needs or wants to participate in; both leisure activities and necessities of life.

This could be playing, riding a mountain bike or making a cup of tea. An underpinning belief is that people stay healthy when they can function physically, emotionally and mentally in an appropriate environment of choice. So a vital part of training is learning about what motivates people and how the body works.

Study begins with students looking at themselves as occupational people before learning about people with impairments and at community and population health.

Papers include human anatomy and physiology, health and the environment and enabling physical performance for occupation.

Occupational therapists work with everyone from children to the elderly in a range of areas including mental health, physical health, rehabilitation, primary care and health promotion.

The degree is intensive and involves learning in the classroom and in the field.

AUT and Otago Polytechnic pro-

vide the only occupational therapy degrees in New Zealand. Graduates can apply to register in New Zealand or to practise abroad.

### THE GRADUATE

Kylie Kerr, 21

**Occupational therapist (OT) for Waitakere Hospital acute medical wards.**

**Finished degree in November 2008.** I am one of three OTs providing acute care and rehabilitation for people who are acutely unwell. "Acute" means people are not in a critical state but are at risk of becoming critical.

So if people want to go home, we aim for a safe discharge and positive outcome by getting them functioning to the level they were before they became unwell. This could be looking at whether they can shower and dress independently, cook for themselves, or do whatever it is they need to do.

We do a lot of screening and work closely with social workers, needs assessors and physiotherapists to assess in every possible way and find as many solutions as we can.

I've started in a hospital because I think it is a good learning place for a new graduate because there are lots of variety and complex complications.

### Shore and Waitakere Hospital.

I look for OTs with a strong professional identity who can confidently apply the concepts of occupational therapy in the acute hospital setting.

They need an ability to quickly establish rapport with people from all walks of life. They also need good written communication because the job involves clinical note writing and making recommendations that can have a big impact on an individual's situation.

I look for people with a high degree of resilience, who can confidently manage the pressures of the work and bring positive energy to the team.

Degree training gives graduates a good grasp of the theoretical concepts of OT that can be applied effectively in the hospital setting.

With the right degree of support and supervision, most new graduates operate confidently and effectively in the hospital setting.

A large part of OT degree training involves fieldwork placements which is very influential in preparing students for the workforce.

An issue here is that many OTs see acute services as a good place to start a career, but not necessarily a long-term career option which means it can be

### TRAINING PLACE

**Bachelor of Health Sciences: Occupational Therapy (Level 7)**

**AUT University, North Shore Akoranga Campus**

**0800 28 88 64 or 921 99 999**

**courseinfo@aut.ac.nz**

**http://www.aut.ac.nz/study-at-aut/study-areas/health-sciences**

**Three years full time**

**Entry requirements: University**

**Entrance (or equivalent), police**

**clearance and meet Health**

**Practitioners Competence**

**Assurance requirements.**

**Intake: up to 120 per year**

**2010 applications now open**

**Fees (2009): \$4711 a year, plus**

**travel and accommodation costs**

**related to placements, especially**

**when outside Auckland.**

**Starting Salary: \$42,000 –**

**\$43,000 a year under DHBs.**

hard to retain them. A big part of my job is to change these perceptions and look at ways of making the role attractive as a long-term career option.

*Angela McCarthy*

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