

GUEST EDITORIAL

Benefits of recreation therapy services

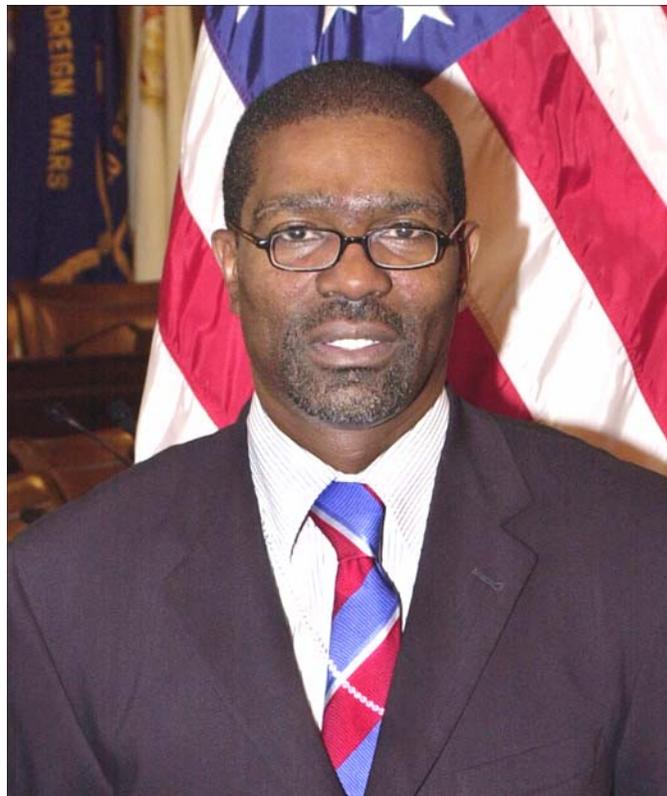
A frequently asked question that I hear from individuals who have never had contact with a recreation therapist is, What is recreation therapy? The answer is, recreation therapy is a profession that uses various activities to improve the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social functioning of individuals disabled as a result of trauma or disease. In addition, it is meant to increase independence in life activities [1].

Treatment interventions are delivered in inpatient, transitional, and home- or community-based settings. The activities are structured, and they target the reduction of specific symptoms that addresses prevention, health promotion, and health risk factors.

The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, dated April 1991, defines recreation therapy as a profession of specialists who utilize activities as a form of treatment for persons who are physically, mentally, or emotionally disabled [1].

Research indicates that recreational therapy services offer a diversity of rehabilitation benefits that addresses the needs of individuals with a range of disabling conditions. In 1991, the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) and Temple University published the *Benefits of Therapeutic Recreation: A Consensus View* [2]. The benefits listed in this publication are as follows:

- Improves physical, cognitive, social, and emotional functioning.
- Develops skills needed to enhance functional independence for community living to promote a higher quality of life for individuals and their families.
- Provides individuals with disabilities mechanisms to prevent declines in physical, cognitive, and psychosocial functioning and, consequently, reduces the need for healthcare services.
- Reduces secondary disability and associated higher healthcare costs:
 - * Improves community-living skills and reduces the need for extended inpatient hospitalization.



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- * Improves independent functioning, thus reducing demands on healthcare providers.
- * Improves physical functioning and fitness affecting general health and well-being.
- * Reduces secondary medical complications arising from spinal cord injury and other physical disabilities.
- Promotes the development of social skills for integration into vocational and avocational endeavors among other outcomes.

The shortage of available allied health personnel has resulted in the limited availability of services in some areas. In areas where demand exceeds available personnel, higher salaries may be required for effective recruitment and retention. When the shortage of available healthcare personnel results in higher personnel costs, it also

increases the total cost of rehabilitation care. The inclusion of recreational therapy services further expands the available pool of qualified rehabilitation personnel to respond to the needs of the healthcare consumer at a reasonable cost.

In the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), recreation and creative arts therapists provide treatment services for veterans. Some of the veterans we serve bear visible signs of their service to this great nation, such as a missing limb, a jagged scar, or a certain look in their eye. Others carry invisible signs, such as a pin holding a bone together or a piece of shrapnel in their leg. More often than not, one cannot tell just by looking. Recreation and creative arts therapists are grateful for the men and women who receive clinical care in a Veterans Health Administration facility. One of VA's goals is to contribute to the public health of the nation through research. There are many research opportunities in recreation and creative arts therapies. Some of the questions research may answer are—

- What are the effects of physical activity in reducing the risk of breast cancer?
- What are the benefits of recreation therapy in the health of homebound patients?

- What are the effects of neurologic music therapy techniques in physical rehabilitation of neurological disorders including stroke, multiple sclerosis, and Parkinson's disease?
- What are the effects of neurologic music therapy techniques in the maintenance of physical function in Huntington's disease, Alzheimer's, and other dementia?

The recreation and creative arts therapies result in many healthcare benefits for individuals with disabilities. My hope is that with research, we will be able to educate internal and external audiences about the importance of both professions to the quality of life and well-being of persons with disabilities.

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REFERENCES

1. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Occupational Outlook Handbook. 1991 April.
2. National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) and Temple University [Agreement No.: H133B80048]. Benefits of therapeutic recreation: A consensus view. 1999.