tissues to facilitate stretching and help with inflammation and the pool can even be used to decrease pain secondary to the warmth of a therapeutic pool.

I, myself, have seen individuals with various severities of TM. I have seen clients that needed assistance for self and home tasks at the end of therapy. I have seen individuals that regained enough strength to function independently, but needed the use of bracing and/or a wheelchair. I have also seen individuals that were able to return to walking and independent living. Each stage is difficult for the client, because they are never sure exactly what they will get back and they are forced to find new ways to do previous tasks. If someone will need to use a wheelchair, even part of the time, a team of experts should recommend it. The posture one has in a wheelchair can influence their skin, breathing, eating, comfort, proper joint function, proper muscle function and level of community function.

What would happen to someone with TM if they did not receive physical therapy? They would not maximize their potential for recovery of function. It could be compared to an athlete without a coach. A therapist is trained to evaluate and recommend appropriate treatment during the entire duration of recovery. Something as minor as an ankle becoming tight while you are in a stage of relative inactivity can become major if it is allowed to stay tight for too long. It can significantly impact your ability to walk. Problems such as this are caught early by a physical therapist and actions are taken to avoid or correct them.

*Theresa received a Bachelors degree in Early Childhood Education from The Ohio State University and went on to receive a Masters degree in*

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**Why a Person with TM Should Consider Occupational Therapy**

Theresa Frasca Berner, MOT, OTR/L

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**Occupational Therapy from Medical College of Ohio in Toledo. Theresa has been employed at The Ohio State University Medical Center, Dodd Hall for seven years. She is currently the Spinal Cord Injury System of Care Team Leader. She facilitates programming for individuals with Spinal Cord Injuries across the continuum and ensures that their needs are met from a therapy perspective. Theresa also coordinates and runs a wheelchair seating and positioning clinic with Lisa Fugate, MD. Theresa is very active in community organizations and is a strong advocate for community reentry, as well as adapted sports.**

Occupational therapy is a health and rehabilitation profession designed to help people regain and build skills that are important for health, well being, security, and happiness. Occupational therapists work with people of all ages who, because of physical, developmental, social, or emotional deficits, need specialized assistance in learning skills to enable them to lead independent, productive, and satisfying lives.

Most people tend to be familiar with the role physical therapy plays in the rehabilitation process. People seem to be less aware of the important role of occupational therapy in this process. A source of people’s confusion may be that the two professions are not clearly differentiated and while there are significant differences, they are not easy to describe. Perhaps the best way to explain the differences between physical and occupational therapy is to offer an example of our approaches in the rehabilitation process.

Should an individual have a traumatic event, which has left them immobile, and were they fortunate enough to be able to work on the skills of walking, a physical therapist would focus on the process of getting them to walk. An occupational therapist would enter this process and would take it one step further. The occupational therapist would perform an assessment of what the individual’s lifestyle had been before the traumatic event. The occupational therapist would determine what strategies need to be in place and what skills need to be developed in order for the individual to go home. Additionally, the occupational therapist would evaluate the strategies and skills that would be required for the individual to return to the roles that had been taken away from them or disrupted or diminished due to the traumatic event. Both physical therapists and occupational therapists work with a person to help restore independence. A physical therapist will focus on the person’s physical abilities in regaining independence; an occupational therapist will work on strategies and skills to assist restoring the individual’s independence in a more holistic sense. In other words, physical therapy teaches people how to walk, transfer, and move around. Occupational therapy helps people to regain their lives by teaching them how to take care of themselves, how to get dressed, how to cook, how to manage their homes, and how to return to their previous roles and lifestyles. To accomplish these goals, occupational therapy can teach someone compensatory skills to
complete an activity, they can assist in modifying the environment to support the individual’s level of ability, or they may introduce adaptive equipment to complete a task.

Transverse Myelitis is a frightening and difficult condition, which can cause one to lose their ability to complete even the simplest tasks. Many of you experienced the sudden onset of TM and were offered little or no explanation as to the causes of this condition. Occupational therapy is an important resource for the TM population, because we can help you regain some control over your lives as your body is recovering from the disease. The ability to do for oneself is one of the most powerful tools to having control over a life-changing event that has placed you in a position of helplessness. Occupational therapy can help you begin the process of regaining back that control.

It is difficult to use a global example, which would apply to every person, because each of you is so different and possess different needs. In addition, the disease affects people at different levels, and the symptoms of TM demonstrate great variability.

Think to yourself, what is it that would help you feel better about yourself? To those of you who have limited use of your arms, would you want to be able to get dressed at your own pace and put on your makeup by yourself? Would you like to be able to cook your favorite meal by yourself? Would you want to be able to participate in leisure activities, such as gardening or fishing? To those of you who are fortunate enough to have use of your arms, but not be able to walk as you previously did, have you thought about wanting to be able to drive and being able to go wherever you want to go? Have you thought about wanting to go to the park with your children? Have you thought about wanting to return to work? For those of you who are adventurous, have you thought about wanting to snow ski or water ski, play basketball, or go rock climbing?

For most of you, the answers to these questions would be a resounding YES; and, yes, there is a way to participate in all the above activities. We may need to alter the way you do it. For instance, we might need to show you tricks for tying your shoes without using your fingers. Or we might have to teach you how to modify the environment, for instance, by installing hand controls in your car. Or we might even provide you with adaptive equipment, such as adaptive ski equipment to race down the ski hill -- with lessons, of course! The important message is that there is a way to return to doing almost any task, if you have the will to do it. Occupational therapists can become your partners in achieving any goals you set before yourself.

Many of you are in a grieving process and may not think all of the above activities are important because your primary focus is on understanding what is going on with your body and on your recovery. I am suggesting that while your focus is vitally important, these other life-issues are critical, as well. Finding a balance in life is so important to all of us, and that is regardless of our life circumstances. Occupational therapy works from the above activities. We may need to alter the way you do it. Occupational therapists can become your partners in achieving any goals you set before yourself.

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