



In-Home Occupational Therapy Helps Patients Regain Independence



April 28, 2022

April is Occupational Therapy Month, a time to celebrate the professionals who help patients regain the ability to perform everyday activities after physical injury or stroke, or for people with brain cancer, neurological conditions, diabetes, arthritis, or other serious long-term illness. They work closely with patients to improve fine motor, visual, cognitive, and perceptual skills so everyday tasks like buttoning a shirt, putting on shoes, cutting food, brushing their teeth, or writing their name becomes easier.

At [Visiting Nurse Service of New York \(VNSNY\)](#), occupational therapists (OTs) visit patients in their homes to help adapt day-to-day routines in an atmosphere that is comfortable and familiar. Doing therapy in a home setting allows OTs to work with a patient's actual living environment, instead of having to recreate it in a clinic.

OTs also help patients learn how to use specially designed equipment and come up with strategies that will help patients complete basic tasks safely and recover more quickly through exercises, wheelchair seating and positioning programs, and modifications to the home.

While there is no such thing as a "typical" day for an OT because every day brings new challenges and triumphs, **Erica Kaplan-Gebler** of VNSNY has offered a look into what her shift often looks like.

Erica starts every day by checking her tablet for new cases or any changes that might have been added by the scheduling team the night before. On her commute to the City from New Jersey, it is not uncommon for her to receive scheduling changes while in transit. Stressing the importance of flexibility,

Erica notes that it's almost impossible to plan a week, or even a few days, in advance. She might have a general idea of what the day may bring, but at any given moment a client might have been transferred to (or discharged from) the hospital, or might need to cancel if they're unwell, feeling too weak, or have a doctor's appointment. Erica is always ready for last-minute changes—even within a session—if the client isn't up to it or has a different goal in mind.

Covering Manhattan from Midtown to the Upper East Side, Erica walks to her appointments, which often amounts to seven miles a day—with her backpack.

"I'm not really a desk-job type of person and given everything patients have been going through with COVID-19, I just wanted to be out there," Erica notes. "My job is to help people get back to their everyday routines—making them comfortable, getting them back into the shower on their own, and helping them become independent again if they were independent before their illness or hospitalization. Those needs didn't change during the pandemic."

A typical day for Erica includes six to seven patient visits. Between appointments, Erica finds a spot in a local park to enjoy being outdoors while compiling her notes and calling doctors' offices for orders. After her last appointment, which is usually between 3:30 and 4:00, Erica finishes the notes from her visits for that day before making the commute back home.

Back in New Jersey, after dinner and a workout, Erica can't help but do a quick scan of the next day's assignments to see if there's any prep work she needs to do.

"It's a busy schedule, but I really like my team, and I love what I do!"

Thank you to Erica and all the OTs working hard to help their patients regain independence. For more information about VNSNY's occupational therapy and rehabilitation services, call 1-800-675-0391 or visit vnsny.org.