Occupational Therapist: Alternative Careers
A guide for newcomers to British Columbia
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In BC, occupational therapists develop programs for people affected by illness, injury or disability in order to improve their ability to look after themselves and engage in work or leisure activities. Occupational therapists work in a variety of settings, such as hospitals, rehabilitation clinics, day programs, home-care programs, schools and industry. They also work in settings where clients live or work or in community settings where clients participate in leisure activities.

You may find that your international training and experience as an occupational therapist are not immediately accepted in B.C. The skills you have acquired as an occupational therapist (communication, interpersonal, analytical and problem solving skills, compassion and understanding, ability to work with ill, disabled or injured people) can be used in these alternative careers:

- rehabilitation assistant
- recreational therapist
- rehabilitation counsellor

Alternative Careers:

Rehabilitation Assistant (NOC 3414)

Also look for these job titles: occupational therapy assistant, physiotherapy assistant, physical therapy assistant, therapy assistant

Rehabilitation assistants help patients as directed by health-care professionals such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists and chiropractors. They administer treatments to reduce patients’ pain and to help them regain as much mobility as possible. They work in rehabilitation clinics, hospitals, long-term care facilities, retirement homes, physiotherapists’ offices, and outpatient clinics, and sometimes in private homes and fitness centres.

Duties include:

- prepare and maintain equipment and supplies
- help patients as directed by health-care professionals such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists and chiropractors
- monitor patients’ responses and report to the health care professional
- teach exercises to patients, and help them walk or stand up

Requirements:

- completion of a recognized Rehabilitation Assistant Program or an equivalent combination of education, training and experience

Skills:

- strong interpersonal and communication skills are essential; assistants must be patient and keep their clients motivated
- organizational and time management skills
- strength and stamina are also required, as rehabilitation assistants often need to perform physical tasks such as helping clients to walk and demonstrating exercises

Wages:

- median hourly wage: $17.75

Sources:  
http://www.workbc.ca/Job-Seekers/Career-Profles/3414
Working in Canada (profile for “occupational therapy assistant”)
http://www.workingincanada.gc.ca
Recreation Therapist (NOC 3144)
Recreation therapists use leisure activities to improve the health of people who are emotionally or physically ill or disabled, and for those who need rehabilitative care after an accident or injury. They work in hospitals, rehabilitation centres, long-term care facilities, nursing homes, and park and recreation departments.

Duties include:
- use tests, observations, and medical records to assess clients’ needs
- develop treatment plan for specialized therapy sessions based on art, athletic, dance, drama, music or recreational therapies or remedial gymnastics
- lead clients through treatment
- watch and analyze patients during treatment sessions
- record findings, write progress reports and consult with other health-care professionals to evaluate treatment plan

Requirements:
- a relevant post-secondary degree, e.g. recreation therapy, athletic therapy, kinesiology, exercise science, or physical education

Skills:
- strong communication and problem solving skills
- comfortable working with people who are ill or disabled
- patient and tactful
- manual dexterity
- physical stamina
- able to work independently and as part of a team

Wages:
- median hourly wage: $22.96

Sources: [http://www.workbc.ca/Job-Seekers/Career-Profiles/3144](http://www.workbc.ca/Job-Seekers/Career-Profiles/3144)
Career Cruising database (Profile for “Recreation Therapist”)

Rehabilitation Counsellor (NOC 4153)
Also look for this job title: vocational rehabilitation counsellor
Rehabilitation counsellors help injured people adjust back into the workplace and resume their normal daily activities. They work in counselling centres, social service agencies, group homes, government agencies, health-care and rehabilitation facilities, workers’ compensation boards, and other organizations.

Duties include:
- assess clients’ injuries or disabilities; prepare case histories
- work with therapists, doctors, and social workers to develop rehabilitation programs
- provide information on overcoming obstacles, funding, and other services
- monitor clients’ progress
- maintain records to be used in hearings or trials

Requirements:
- bachelor’s degree, preferably in rehabilitation services or a related field
- Certification may be required as Registered Rehabilitation Professional (RRP) through the Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada (VRA). RRP certification requires relevant undergraduate degree (e.g. occupational therapy) and two years relevant
work experience with persons who have disability or disadvantage. For details on certification and assessment process, see:
http://vracanada.com/professional_designations.php

Skills:
- patience and compassion
- ability to deal with clients who are under stress
- self-motivated and organized

Wages:
- median hourly wage $29.54

Sources: http://www.workbc.ca/Job-Seekers/Career- Profiles/4153
Career Cruising database (Profile for “Rehabilitation Counsellor”) http://www.vpl.ca/extDB/login.remoteDB?CareerCruising

Employment Outlook
Changes in the economy have little or no impact on the health care industry, as occupations in this industry group generally provide essential services. The health care and social assistance industry group is mainly affected by demographics and government policy.

Population growth increases demand for health care and social assistance services. An aging population also generally increases demand, because as people age, they are more likely to require health care and social services. Increased government spending has a generally positive impact on industry activity and on job opportunities for health care workers.

Expected annual demand growth rate (2010-2020) in physiotherapy, occupational therapy and rehabilitation positions ranges from 2.2% to 2.4%. The unemployment rate is projected to decrease from approximately 4.3% in 2010 to 3.1% in 2015 and then to 2% in 2020.

Source: http://www.workbc.ca/

Retraining
You may want to consider upgrading your skills to increase your employment options in this field. The following courses may improve your current skill set:

Kwantlen Polytechnic University: Professional Communications for Internationally Educated Health Professionals (IEHP)
Program will improve communication for entry into professional practice, improve pronunciation, expand health and idiomatic vocabulary, improve written skills for documentation, and increase awareness of communication styles and understanding of culturally expected behaviours of the Canadian health care system
http://www.kpu.ca/__shared/assets/IEHP_Brochure_June_201326208.pdf

Thompson Rivers University (TRU) Open Learning: Medical English
Provides an opportunity to develop or strengthen your understanding of medical terminology as it is used in a Canadian health care context. Case scenarios, dialogues and
discussions related to body systems, medications will be used to develop language skills. Internationally educated health care providers will be able to acquire career-specific language development. Thirty week program, web-based instruction
http://www.tru.ca/distance/courses/hlth1061.html

Rehabilitation Assistant / Occupational & Physical Therapist Assistant / Therapist Assistant Diploma Programs
Programs cover physiotherapy and occupational therapy and range from four to five semesters (up to two years); full time attendance and practicum placements required
*Capilano University, Rehabilitation Assistant Diploma, including speech language/audiology*
http://www.capilanou.ca/radp/
*Okanagan College, including recreation therapy*
http://www.okanagan.bc.ca/Programs/Areas_of_Study/health/therapist-assistant/
*Vancouver Community College*
http://www.vcc.ca/programscourses/program-areas/health-sciences/occupationalphysical-therapist-assistant-rehab-assistant/

**Douglas College: Employment Supports Specialty Advanced Certificate**
Part Time, post-degree program that provides comprehensive and specialized knowledge of employment supports and disability management services for people with disabilities
http://www.douglas.bc.ca/calendar/programs/employment-supports-specialty.html

Searching for Jobs:

**BC Government Job Postings**
https://search.employment.gov.bc.ca/
British Columbia public services employment opportunities

**B.C. Health Authorities**
http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/socsec/ (select link for each region and then go to ‘Careers’) Regional services including publicly funded hospitals and residential care facilities

**B.C. Provincial Health Services Authority Job Postings**
http://jobs.phsa.ca/
Lists jobs available in specialty institutions such as BC Transplant, Women’s Hospital, BC Children’s Hospital

**Health E Careers**
http://www.healthecareers.com/

**HealthMatch**
Health Match BC is a free health professional recruitment service funded by the Government of British Columbia

**Providence Health Care**
http://www.providencehealthcare.org/careers
Volunteering in the Field

Volunteering in health care facilities can help you to explore a new career and learn more about the health care system in BC. You will meet new people and build a network of contacts that can lead to information on job openings and inside connections with potential employers. The following organizations accept volunteers in hospitals, residential care facilities, adult day centres, palliative care and other community settings.

Canadian Red Cross
http://www.redcross.ca/where-we-work/in-canada/british-columbia-and-yukon
see 'Community Support Initiatives'

Fraser Health Authority
http://www.fraserhealth.ca/about_us/get_involved/volunteer/

Providence Health Care
http://www.providencehealthcare.org/volunteers

Vancouver Coastal Health Authority
http://www.vch.ca/get_involved/volunteer  including these rehabilitation centres:
- G.F. Strong Rehabilitation Centre http://gfstrong.vch.ca/
- Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children
  http://www.bcchildrens.ca/Services/SunnyHillHealthCtr/AboutUs/Volunteer.htm

VOLWEB.ca
http://volweb.ca/volweb/

Community Care Facilities, BC Ministry of Health
Other volunteer opportunities may be available from individual care facilities across BC:
- http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/ccf
Helpful Resources

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists BC
http://www.caot.ca/default.asp?pageid=4125

Rehabilitation Assistants Association of British Columbia (RAABC)
http://raaofbc.ca/

Therapy BC
http://www.therapybc.ca/
Public sector therapists working with children

Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada (VRA)
http://vracanada.com/

Resume and cover letter help:

Networking and accessing the hidden job market:

Getting Canadian work experience:

Transferable Skills:

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