

Celebrating the occupation of occupational therapy



Joey Fong is an occupational therapist at the Forensic Psychiatric Hospital in Coquitlam

After 17 years at the Forensic Psychiatric Hospital in Coquitlam, occupational therapist Joey Fong feels lucky that he can still say he loves his job.

“There’s never a dull moment around here. My role is so varied, interesting and challenging,” says Joey, who worked in a variety of positions at the hospital before going back to school in 2012 to earn his Master of Occupational Therapy. “Really, I’m loving it.”

The Forensic Psychiatric Hospital sees patients who have mental illnesses and have been in conflict with the law – the only setting of its kind in the province. Joey works in Rehabilitation Services, where he helps people develop the skills they need to improve functioning, with the goal of reintegrating into the community. Occupational therapists define “occupations” as any activities that are meaningful to a person – like cooking, exercising or going to school. Joey finds things that are important to his clients and engages them in those activities, while trying to improve their ability to do them.

“It can be challenging. We have a unique set of clients, but the great thing about our rehab team is we have a bunch of really good problem solvers. We look at challenges as opportunities. We try not to see those things as barriers, but as opportunities to be creative and think outside of the box.”

Every day is something different. On any given day, you might find Joey recommending equipment, working with patients who are living in seclusion or helping clients through the discharge process.

A soccer success story

One story that has stuck with Joey involves a client who spent most of his time in a seclusion room. It can be challenging working with these high-risk clients, but Joey and his colleagues have developed innovative ways to engage them that are safe, yet introduce new stimuli and encourage positive interactions.

This person was a Liverpool soccer fan from England. Since he couldn’t come out to watch games and couldn’t safely have a TV in the seclusion room, staff brought the games to him. Through his window, he could watch his favourite team from back home on a laptop.

“Working with Ray, one of our recreation therapists, we weren’t sure if this would work or if it would engage our client at all. But we played the Liverpool theme song for him and he got up and came to the door. He stayed engaged with us for about 20 minutes watching clips. Each session we worked with him, it got progressively longer and longer,” says Joey. “It really helped that Ray was a Liverpool fan, too!” Soon the client was smiling, laughing and engaging in conversation. He continues to improve every day, as the team looks for new ways to challenge him and provide opportunities for growth.

“Seeing things like that, seeing them progress and be able to engage with things and move forward –that’s why I come to work,” says Joey.

More face time, less chase time

Being client-focused is at the core of everything Joey does. And when he joined the Clinical Device Task Force for the Clinical and Systems Transformation (CST) project last year, he learned the benefits the project will have for his clients – and himself. “What started out as just looking at devices branched into the other ways we can make our systems better for our staff – easier to use and more accessible,” he says. “I’m a big fan of using technology where we can make our lives easier and our care more responsive.”

Joey says streamlining care will allow teams to focus more on people instead of unnecessarily complicated processes. “Any way we can make work easier, it allows people to do their jobs better. And the end result is better client care, because we’re not fussing about how we have to do this arduous process if can do it quicker. That’s more time we can focus on our patients.”

A life-changing decision

In light of World Occupational Therapy Day on Oct. 27, Joey reflects on what his job means to him. “Going back to school was one of the best things I’ve ever done,” he says. “I feel fortunate to be in the situation I’m in and to have the role I have. As occupational therapists, we look at people holistically. What can I put in place so this person can improve their functioning and return home? Honestly, it’s really cool.”

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