Making the Most of Fieldwork

Fieldwork is one of the most valuable experiences of your education. It gives you the opportunity to put all that you’ve learned into practice, under the supervision of a trained OT/OTA whose role is to teach you more and help you to improve. You can’t be a successful new grad/beginning OT without it. Therefore it’s vital that you make the most of the experience. To help you along, here’s a list of Do’s and Don’ts to keep in mind during your fieldwork placement.

**DO**

*Ask questions* – You’re there to learn. You can’t learn if you pretend that you know everything or are afraid to ask when you don’t. Your supervisor, professor and other employees at the facility are there to help. Ask.

*Study up* – Just as important as asking questions is taking the initiative to study up on things you might be rusty on or techniques unique to your facility. Read manuals, academic books, journals and more to prepare for your fieldwork each day.

*Advocate* – This is your learning experience. While you can’t be thrown out on your own on day one, you should have the opportunity to see and work with patients. If this isn’t happening, speak with your supervisor and/or professor to see what can be done to get you in a more hands-on, learning-friendly environment.

*Utilize those around you* – The people in the facility around you, as well as those back on campus, are in leadership and professional positions because they have experience. Learn from them. This entails not only asking questions but observing them, discussing cases as appropriate, and being willing to go to them for help and other matters.

*Behave professionally* – Though you are still a student, this is your first step into the professional world. References and sometimes even jobs can come from fieldwork. Be respectful, enthusiastic and everything else you would be at a job. Essentially, put your best foot forward.

*Know the expectations* – Be organized. Again, approach fieldwork as you would a job or a class. Figure out what you need to accomplish each day and within the semester. Take the steps you need to accomplish those things in a calm, efficient way.

**DON’T**

*Don’t panic* – Yes it’s a big step. Yes, there will be things you don’t know and times that you mess up, but you can do it. You’ve come this far; you’ll go farther. Don’t let anxiety get the best of you. Walk into your facility cool, calm and ready to practice.

*Don’t assume* – This goes for almost every aspect of the fieldwork environment. Don’t assume you’ll figure out how to appropriately treat a patient; don’t assume you’ve completed the paperwork properly the first time. But also don’t assume that you’ve done anything wrong. If you assume anything – anything at all – assume that the people around you want to help, review and offer guidance as you work.

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*Don’t be afraid* – This goes hand in hand with advocating (one of the DO’s). Don’t be afraid to stand up for yourself and take initiative. If you’re being treated poorly or aren’t getting the information/supervision you need, don’t be afraid to ask for more. This is your experience.

*Don’t overdo it* – You’re eager to learn and to make a stellar impression on your supervisor. However, that doesn’t mean you have to overload yourself. Be mindful of what you’re taking on. If it gets to be too much, talk with your supervisor about the caseload and things you can do together for a maximum experience.

*Don’t take this casually* – While you don’t want to overdo it, you don’t want to look at this experience as something casual and unimportant. You’re there to learn. Learn.

*Don’t gossip/complain* – While you should be friendly with the other professionals at your facility, you shouldn’t look at them as people to vent to or gossip about others with. You’re there to be professional. Put the gossip and complaining on hold.

One final DO: Have fun. This will be your career – maybe not in this facility or even this field of OT, but it will be your career. You chose it for a reason. Enjoy it.

Information for this patient handout retrieved from:

- AOTA - http://www.aota.org/Students