

## Allied health staff (therapy staff)

Allied health staff are health professionals who work with medical and nursing staff to provide patient care. In private hospitals, allied health staff are privately contracted on the basis of identified patient needs. They tend not to be regular employees of the hospital. The level of health insurance coverage or the patient's own ability to pay may affect their access to these services.

In public hospitals, allied health staff are employees. They are funded to provide services on specific wards based on the identified needs of patients. However, not all wards have access to all allied health services.

## Physiotherapists

Physiotherapists focus on restoring a person's function, maximising their mobility (including wheelchair mobility) and health. The three main types of physiotherapy are:

- ▣ Musculoskeletal: muscles, bones and joints.
- ▣ Cardiothoracic: heart and lungs.
- ▣ Neurological: brain and nervous system.

## Occupational therapists (OTs)

Occupational therapists focus on maximising a person's function in activities of daily living (ADLs). This falls into three main groups:

- ▣ Personal ADLs: showering, dressing, toileting, eating, grooming.
- ▣ Domestic ADLs: household tasks like cooking and cleaning.
- ▣ Community ADLs: driving, shopping, social activities.

## Speech pathologists (or therapists)

Speech Pathologists focus on communication and swallowing.

## Psychologists

Psychologists may be clinical (offering counselling) or assessment focused. Assessments can vary but a common one is a neuropsychological assessment. This can provide valuable information about a person's capacity to make decisions for themselves.

*"The social worker became my main contact.  
She really listened to me - and kept me updated."*

## Social workers

Social workers can be a key contact point for families, providing information and support and speaking on your behalf when necessary. They consider the patient's medical needs, social situation, home environment, background and the family dynamics.

Social workers are often involved in complex discharge planning and assisting with residential care arrangements - particularly in public hospitals. They are possibly the best initial contact point for frustrated patients and families.

## Dieticians (or nutritionists)

Dieticians focus on patients' dietary needs. They help modify food intake for weight loss or weight gain, as well as develop special diets. They work closely with speech pathologists in regard to patients with swallowing difficulties and advise on tube feeding as required.



## How to contact allied health staff

In private hospitals, contact allied health staff by phoning them directly. The nurse-in-charge will be able to provide you with their details.

In public hospitals, contact allied health staff in the following ways:

- ▣ Ask for them when you are visiting.
- ▣ Phone them. Contact the hospital and ask for them to be paged.
- ▣ Be present during their appointments with the patient.

If you believe your family member would benefit from being assessed by one of the allied health staff listed above, speak with the nurse in-charge. However patients, carers and families may also contact allied health staff directly - phone the hospital and ask to be put through to 'allied health services' or a particular department.

## Further information:

- ▣ [More information on dealing with hospitals](#)

Contact the **Carer Line** on **1800 242 636\*** to request the above information sheets be sent to you - or to find out about other information sheets in this series.

\*Free call except from mobile phones. Mobile calls at mobile rates.

We do our best to keep these links up to date, but the internet changes all the time. If you can no longer access any of the above resources, please go to our [Internet Troubleshooting Guide](#), or email us at [website@carersvic.org.au](mailto:website@carersvic.org.au)