

Clinical and Other Resources for Persons with Acquired Brain Injury

Both adults and children who sustain brain injuries may be referred to clinical specialists and rehabilitation professionals for evaluation and treatment. Detailed below are descriptions of the specialties and responsibilities of these clinicians:

Acupuncturist: is a graduate of an acupuncture school approved by the Committee on Acupuncture (COA). In Massachusetts acupuncturists are licensed and certified by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM). Acupuncturists complete coursework in anatomy, physiology, herbal therapy, and undergo extensive clinical training. Acupuncturists may treat migraines and other types of headaches; chronic pain associated with neurological conditions; and other conditions (e.g., side effects of chemotherapy).

Audiologist: is a licensed clinician who specializes in the assessment and treatment of hearing and vestibular disorders (disorders affecting balance), associated with neurological and other conditions. Treatment interventions may include fitting individuals with hearing aides or assistive listening devices (ALDs) and hearing rehabilitation. Audiologists may hold a master's degree, and most audiologists have a doctoral degree and meet standards of clinical competence established by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA).

Audiology Assistant: is a certified professional who holds an associate's or bachelor's degree, and provides clinical services under the supervision of an audiologist.

Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS): holds a bachelor's degree and is certified by the National Council for Therapeutic Recreation (NCTRC). Recreation therapists address the recreational and leisure activity needs of individuals with disabilities and illnesses, as well as other groups (e.g., elderly). Activities are designed to promote socialization; physical and emotional wellness; and community inclusion. These activities may include arts and crafts; film and reading groups; sports; and participation in community events and excursions.

Endocrinologist: is a licensed physician who specializes in the assessment and treatment of individuals who have endocrine disorders, which affect glands (e.g., thyroid gland) resulting in abnormal levels of hormones (e.g., insulin levels in persons diagnosed with diabetes). Some endocrine disorders are associated with acquired brain injury (e.g., tumors of the pituitary gland within the brain).

Music Therapist (MT-BC): may hold a bachelor's degree or advanced degree, and is certified by the Certification Board for Music Therapists. In Massachusetts, some music therapists may have completed a master's degree in mental health counseling, with a concentration in music therapy; these individuals are licensed as mental health counselors (LMHC). Music therapists use techniques (e.g., listening to music; singing) to promote emotional healing and support; diminish perception of pain; reduce anxiety; and maintain social connections.

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Neurologist: a licensed physician who specializes in the non-surgical assessment, treatment and management of individuals with acquired brain injury and other neurological disorders (e.g., seizure disorders; migraines and other types of headaches). Neurologists may refer individuals for neurodiagnostic tests, such as head CT scans (computed tomography); MRIs (magnetic resonance imaging); and EEGs (electroencephalogram) to assess the structural or functional changes associated with brain injuries.

Neuro-Oncologist: is a licensed physician, who may be a neurosurgeon, neurologist, or oncologist who specializes in the assessment and treatment of individuals who are diagnosed with tumors of the nervous system.

Neuro-Ophthalmologist: is a licensed physician who specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of visual disorders associated with diseases and disorders of the nervous system.

Neuropsychologist: is a licensed psychologist, who has completed a doctoral degree, as well as pre-doctoral and post-doctoral training in the neurosciences. Clinical neuropsychologists assess the neurocognitive and neurobehavioral changes associated with acquired brain injuries and other neurological conditions, and develop rehabilitative strategies and interventions.

Neuropsychiatrist: is a licensed physician and psychiatrist who specializes in assessing and treating the behavioral changes and mental disorders associated with brain injuries and other neurological conditions (e.g., prescribing medications to treat the behavioral changes associated with brain injury).

Neurosurgeon: is a licensed physician who specializes in the surgical treatment of brain injuries and other neurological disorders affecting the nervous system, including the brain, spinal cord, and the peripheral nerves. Surgical interventions include: procedures to remove a blood clot within the brain (e.g., subdural hematoma); excision of a brain tumor; and placement of a shunt in the brain for treatment of hydrocephalus (abnormal build-up of cerebrospinal fluid).

Occupational Therapist (OT): is a licensed rehabilitation clinician who may hold a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree from an accredited program. OTs treat persons with brain injuries to improve their ability to perform Activities of Daily Living (ADL), such as bathing, dressing, eating. OTs also assist individuals with enhancing independence in performing Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL) skills, including shopping and other household chores; home, school, and work-related organizational tasks; money management; transportation and other tasks.

Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA/COTA): is a certified professional who has graduated from an accredited educational program, and who provides clinical services under the supervision of a licensed occupational therapist.

Osteopathic Physician: is a licensed physician whose training and practice emphasizes an integrated approach to diagnosing and treating disease. Doctors of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) may be certified in physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R), psychiatry and neurology.

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Physiatrist: is a licensed physician who specializes in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R). Physiatrists provide assessment (e.g., muscle and nerve conduction studies) and treatment (e.g., treatment of spasticity with medications) for persons with a range of physically-disabling conditions, including those with brain and spinal cord injuries.

Physical Therapist (PT): is a doctoral level and licensed rehabilitation clinician who assesses and provides treatment to individuals with brain and spinal cord injuries. Manual therapy, electrical stimulation of muscles, aquatic therapy and other therapeutic techniques may be utilized to improve physical strength and endurance; walking (gait) and mobility (e.g., use of an electric wheelchair); balance and coordination. In collaboration with occupational therapists, PTs also work with individuals with brain injuries to enhance their ability to independently perform Activities of Daily Living (ADL) and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL) tasks.

Physical Therapy Assistant (PTA): is a licensed or certified rehabilitation professional with an associate's degree from an accredited program. A PTA provides certain physical therapies under the supervision of a Physical Therapist.

Pulmonologist: is a licensed physician and internist who specializes in the assessment and treatment of diseases (e.g., COVID-19) and disorders affecting the respiratory system and supporting structures (e.g., diaphragm). Some individuals who sustain brain injury may require assessment and ongoing treatment by a pulmonary specialist: e.g., individuals who require an artificial airway (tracheostomy) and mechanical ventilation.

Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP): is a licensed clinician who holds a master's or doctoral degree and meets standards of clinical competence established by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). SLPs assess and treat communication disorders, including loss of the ability to express or comprehend language (aphasia); articulation disorders due to muscle weakness (dysarthria); fluency disorders (e.g., stuttering). SLPs also provide treatment for swallowing difficulties (dysphagia).

Speech-Language Pathology Assistant: is a certified professional who holds an associate's or bachelor's degree, and provide speech and language therapy services under the direction of a licensed speech-language pathologist.

Rehabilitation Psychologist: is a licensed psychologist who holds a doctoral degree, and provides clinical assessment and treatment services to individuals who have sustained brain injuries or who are diagnosed with other conditions. Rehabilitation psychologists assist individuals in addressing the biopsychosocial impact of brain injury, and may provide psychotherapy; facilitate adjustment and coping skills; promote recovery and independence.

Respiratory Therapist: is a licensed professional who provides care to individuals with respiratory disorders under the supervision of a licensed physician. Services provided may include support services for mechanically-ventilated individuals; administration of oxygen; and respiratory rehabilitation.