

Bernadette OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST Rural, QLD.



“I am always mindful that for many of the clients I visit, I may be the only person they see that week so I believe really listening is very important and kindness goes a very long way.”

Bernadette is an Occupational Therapist practicing in rural Queensland. The services she provides include: visiting clients, providing home modifications, recommending equipment so clients are independent, plus other paper work. Her major challenge in working

in rural Australia is that of isolation – mainly of her clients some who may not have family to offer support, leaving them at risk of poor mental health. Bernadette shares ways in which she has been able to support her clients.

Bernadette’s story:

My day starts with a review of notes of the clients scheduled for the day prior to undertaking visits to these clients. Following the visits, I return to the office to undertake research and to complete my paperwork. This involves working on our healthcare system entering progress notes, billing and preparing diagrams on OT draw for home modifications that are sent to our maintenance team.

The services I provide range from home modifications, which are mostly minor modifications such as, grab rails, ramps and box steps. I also recommend raised toilet seats, shower chairs, bath transfer benches, personal alarms and other specialist equipment such as cutlery, dressing tools, bed ropes or bed poles to enable clients be more independent at home when carrying out their activities of daily living.

I provide many of my clients with mobility aids such as wheeled walkers, wheelchairs, specialist beds, mattresses and pressure relieving cushions. For clients who do not have Home Care Packages these specialist

items can be sourced through the Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme. This involves completing the application forms for clients through an online system, which I ensure to monitor. Prior to prescription of this specialist equipment, I take my clients for trials to our local equipment suppliers to ensure that the equipment is the best fit for their needs.

I teach energy conservation techniques to clients who may be struggling to carry out daily activities. I will also link clients with other services such as the continence nurse, social worker, counsellors and social groups.

Many clients are socially isolated and are struggling with loneliness or facing mental health difficulties as a result of their isolation. They may have lost a life partner and have no other family and feel vulnerable and lost. This is particularly challenging but being able to make some small changes and link clients to other services can make a huge difference. I am always mindful that for many of the clients I visit, I may be the only person they see that week so I believe really listening is very important and kindness goes a very long way.

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...good health and wellbeing in rural and remote Australia

ALLIED HEALTH PERSONAL STORY

There are things that we could differently to improve the care we provide. For example, if some of the finances from Home Care Packages that clients do not use could be distributed to those who are in desperate need for some specialist items it would be of great benefit. If additional funding could be sourced for specialist equipment, it would enable many clients to be more independent in their homes and possibly in the long term reduce the number of elderly people who have to eventually go to Aged Care Facilities.

I #loverural. I really enjoy the autonomy my job affords me. I love the sense of community not only with clients and their families but within the team I work with. The deep appreciation of my client's when I help them meet the simplest everyday needs is most rewarding. I feel privileged to work in this setting.

Bernadette clearly loves her work in the rural areas however, like most of her peers, her work is not without its challenges. Clearly workforce shortage is one of the challenges faced, as she says "... *I may be the only person they [clients] see that week.*" Social isolation is yet another challenge faced by clients however, support is provided by way of sourcing specialist equipment and linking clients to other services, as some might not be able to do this on their own. Bernadette recommends that finances (for purchase of specialist items) be redistributed equitably so that those in greatest need may benefit. Bernadette's story shows the level of commitment that allied health professionals have to their work and to their communities.