

**The role of Occupational Therapists in Haematology: The laughter and tears.**

Cindy Tan, Oi Lam Chiu

*St. Vincent's Hospital, Sydney, NSW, Australia*

## Introduction

Stem cell transplants (SCT) are increasingly being used to treat haematology malignancies. While there has been remarkable progress made, problems still remain in the effects of SCT. There are different types of SCT, different conditioning regime and supportive care. The conditioning regimes involve high dose chemotherapy and may include total body irradiation. Patients are often in hospital for lengthy periods ranging from 21 days to months. For patients who are discharged, they may have repeated hospital admissions. They may experience fatigue and discomfort and may also be isolated while inpatient. Complications following SCT may include severe infections, mucositis and graft versus host disease (GVHD). GVHD occurs when the new cells attack the body. It may affect any part of the body, most commonly gastrointestinal (GI) and skin. GVHD that appears 2-3 weeks post-SCT is termed as acute and chronic GVHD occurs 3 months post-SCT. In acute stage, the skin usually appears rash-like and in severe cases, it may blister and ulcerate. In chronic GVHD, the skin may resemble scleroderma. Symptoms for gastrointestinal GVHD may include nausea, vomiting, anorexia, diarrhoea, and abdominal pain. With all these physical symptoms, it is not uncommon that patients are deconditioned and experience low moods or depression.

## Objectives/Contribution to practice

The purpose of this paper is to present the role of the OT working in the acute setting of a Haematology unit in Sydney, Australia. A case study of a 18 year old with aplastic anaemia who underwent SCT and subsequently sustained the described effects will be used to highlight the challenges faced by the OT. This patient had a lengthy stay in hospital of more than 10 months including rehabilitation. This paper will discuss the various kinds of OT interventions developed and implemented to address the patient's physical, emotional and psychosocial issues. It will also attempt to discuss the role of the patient's family in this situation. This paper will also illustrate the importance of a multi-disciplinary and holistic approach in managing this patient.