

The Enduring Legacy of Lena Hitchcock, World War 1 Occupational Therapy Reconstruction Aide

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Introduction: World War One was pivotal in the development of occupational therapy. Anna Lena Frances Hitchcock became one of the first occupational therapy reconstruction aides in spring 1918 at Walter Reed General Hospital, Washington, DC.

Objectives: To describe the contribution of Lena Hitchcock to the development of occupational therapy.

Method: A case study is presented based on analysis of Lena Hitchcock's memoir 'The Great Adventure', newspaper archives and oral history interviews with Hitchcock.

Results: Hitchcock was stationed at Base Hospital 9 in Chateauroux, France in July 1918. Her memoir written based on her WW1 experiences is a unique window into the early practice of occupational therapy. Before any empirical evidence existed to support the use of therapeutic activities reconstruction aides had a clear belief in the potential of activity to restore physical function and offer psychological benefits. Prior to becoming an occupational therapist Hitchcock was involved in the women's suffrage movement. After the war she again championed the rights of women through her involvement with the Women's Overseas Service League. Hitchcock was also a leader in paediatric services until her retirement in 1967. She helped establish the Occupational Therapy Department at the DC Children's Hospital, Washington, in 1933 and was director of Occupational Therapy at the DC Society for Crippled Children, Washington.

Conclusion: Recording the contribution of pioneers is important not only for commemorative purposes but also to appreciate historical influences on the development of occupational therapy.