

8 Allied health professionals

A Community health

The health of the community depends on a large number of people other than medical practitioners and nurses. These can be grouped under the heading of **allied health professionals**. They include the following:

- **Physiotherapists (physios)** help people to move by getting them to do exercises or by treating their body with heat or **massage** – treatment by manipulating muscles and joints with the hands. (See Unit 42)
- **Occupational therapists (OTs)** help people with a disability to perform tasks at home and at work. A **disability** is a physical or mental condition that makes it difficult to live normally, for example blindness or deafness.
- **Social workers** help people to solve their social problems – for example poor housing or unemployment – or family problems.
- **Chiropodists, also known as podiatrists,** treat conditions affecting the feet.

B Technicians

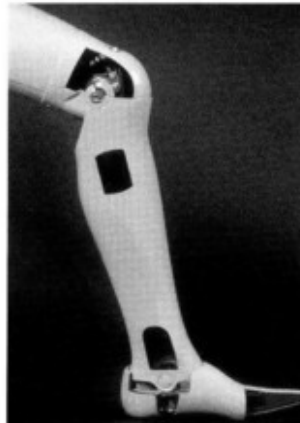
There are numerous **technicians** – people who work with scientific equipment – such as radiographers, who are known as **X-ray technicians**. **Ambulance technicians** work in the emergency medicine service. An ambulance technician with more advanced qualifications is called a **paramedic**.

C Prosthetists and orthotists

Prosthetists and **orthotists** provide care for anyone who needs an **artificial limb**, (a **prosthesis**), or a device to support or control part of the body (an **orthosis**). They also advise on **rehabilitation** – helping patients return to normal life and work after treatment.

Prosthetists provide **artificial replacements** for patients who have had an **amputation** or were born without a limb.

Orthotists provide a range of **splints** and other devices to aid movement, correct **deformity** from an abnormal development of part of the body, for example **club foot (talipes)**, and relieve pain.



A prosthesis



Splints

D Opticians

Opticians test **eyesight** and prescribe **glasses** – also known as **spectacles** – and **contact lenses**, when necessary. The examination includes measuring **intraocular pressure** – the pressure of fluid inside the eye – and examining the retina. If the optician suspects an eye disease, such as **glaucoma**, they refer the patient to their GP for treatment. The GP may then refer the patient to an **ophthalmologist**, a doctor who specializes in diseases of the eye.

8.1 Make word combinations using a word from each box. Look at A, B, C and D opposite to help you.

ambulance
artificial
club
contact
health
intraocular
occupational
social

foot
lens
limb
worker
pressure
technician
professional
therapist

8.2 Which allied health professionals could best help the following people? Look at A, B, C and D opposite to help you.

- 1 a young unmarried woman who has just had a baby
- 2 a woman who is having difficulty using her right arm following a fracture
- 3 someone who needs glasses
- 4 an elderly woman who has had a below knee amputation
- 5 a man whose wife has Alzheimer's disease
- 6 a man with a fungal infection of his feet

8.3 Complete the texts. Look at A and C opposite to help you.

A prosthetist works with patients of all ages as a member of a clinical team, based at a large hospital. The patients may need a prosthesis as the result of an accident, or

(1) following a disease such as diabetes. Alternatively they may have been born without a (2) Orthotists work alongside doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and occupational (3) to give the people under their care the best possible (4) Their main aim is to enable the patient to lead a normal life at work and leisure.

An orthotist often works in a clinic as part of an outpatient service and also visits other centres to provide a service for people with special needs. They deal with people of all ages. For instance, children who have cerebral palsy may require (5) to help them walk and many older people need special shoes to correct (6) If damaged, any part of the human skeleton may require some form of orthosis. The orthosis may be needed to reposition the body or to (7) pain.

Over to you

Britain is introducing a new member to the healthcare team, called a medical care practitioner (MCP), similar to the physician assistant in the United States and other countries. The MCP will be able to carry out some of the functions of a medical practitioner, such as history-taking and examination, and diagnosis and treatment of certain illnesses, without having a medical degree. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this in your opinion?