

**Work Related Practice
Professional Issues Forum
28 July 2006
World Federation Occupational Therapy 2006 Congress**

During the final days of the WFOT conference, co-facilitators Kerry Adams and Jennifer Sims conducted a group-based discussion on current issues in work related practice for occupational therapists. Kerry is a Clinical Educator with the University of Queensland and Jennifer is a Principal Consultant with WorkFocus Australia, based in Sydney. Together, they lead the discussion and identified particular issues, relevant for delegates who work in this area. There were 15 participants in total. The WFOT conference theme applied, as issues spanned from local to global, involving delegates currently practicing in both public and private settings.

Issues:

Do new graduate OTs lack the experience and life skills to enter in to work related practice directly from university?

- In Queensland approximately 35% of new graduates are entering directly into the area of work related practice;
- Clinical experience and/or life skills help to assist new graduates with managing work place challenges and legislative regulations e.g. pressure from unions or managers, ability to respond effectively to confrontation and achieving successful outcomes within limited funding parameters;
- Essential criteria of new graduate students interested in this area should include: self directed work behaviour, exceptional communication and problem-solving skills.

Future considerations:

- Increased exposure to work place settings during university placements to prepare students;
- University curriculum to include learning the role and business drivers of various stakeholders and adjusting communication style to suit stakeholder;
- OT Association focus group to develop specific competency list for new graduates entering work related practice;
- Accreditation to practice in work related areas.

What sets OTs apart from other professions in work related practice?

- In Australia OTs are legislatively recognised as competent in completing specialised assessments including worksite assessments, functional capacity evaluations, activities of daily living assessments;
- In UK OT role is less defined and not legislatively protected;
- In UK OT role is primarily in government and private practice, considered occupational health. Similar to role of brokers in Australia;
- OTs are good at analysing difficult and confronting situations.

Are OTs effective medical legal assessors and report writers?

- Recent study completed in Queensland by Shelley Allen looking at medical specialists and legal professionals feedback on quality of OTs medical legal assessments and reports;
- Feedback includes: OTs are too subjective, tendency toward injured workers report;
- Tips from experienced OT medical legal assessors includes: aim to achieve change; assess and record objectively; use evidence and observations to extrapolate information; and cite relevant medical reports.

Minimising economic loss for employers – are expectations realistic?

- High staff turnover in area of occupational/vocational rehabilitation;
- Few OTs work for agents and tendency toward working with employers offering higher remuneration;
- No Compulsory Third Party (CTP) incentives for employers to accommodate injured workers;
- Motor Accident Authority (MAA) recently developed program for minimising economic loss for employers with injured CTP workers.

Functional Capacity Evaluations (FCE) – are we utilising effectively?

- Clearly defined observations are less often challenged;
- Standardised FCEs are useful for job match purposes, determining injured workers earning capacity and minimising economic loss;
- Modified FCEs are better for onsite workplace observations of injured workers performing required job role tasks;
- Outcome measures for success of occupational/vocational rehabilitation programs e.g. Rula, Reba, Mantra, NIOSH;
- Good resource <http://ergo.human.cornell.edu/>

