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Social inclusion as an agenda in occupational therapy practice: An Australian perspective

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Introduction:

Australian social policy has focused on working from an outside-in perspective, under the premise that policy theoretically drives local action towards promoting inclusive societies. However, such a perspective often does not consider those that the policy is meant to assist, namely marginalized groups of society, nor is it framed from professionals involved in service delivery. In social science literature and discussion, social inclusion is dichotomized as upholding social justice through inclusion as well as being used simultaneously with 'participation'. Knowing that the "primary goal of occupational therapy is to enable people to participate in the activities of everyday life" (WFOT, 2004), clinicians and researchers are perfectly situated to add to the scholarly debate on social inclusion politics.

Objectives:

The purpose of this paper is to educate occupational therapists and scientists about how 'social inclusion' is considered at a national government level by providing the example of the 'Australian government's social inclusion agenda' (DEEWR, 2008), and its relation to 'The Bangkok Charter for Health Promotion in a Globalized World' (WHO, 2005). Knowledge of policy-making geared towards social inclusion and understanding developments in health promotion can lead to enabling occupational justice, make it a key agenda in framing practice and adding to occupational science literature. Furthermore, by understanding social justice and health promotion initiatives through an occupational lens, occupational scientists and therapists have the potential to empower practical ways and share their expert knowledge of participation to direct health organizations and governments in building just policy targeted at marginalized groups in society and give such groups a voice towards enabling participation.

Discussion and Conclusion:

Through critical analysis of the 'Australian government's social inclusion agenda' from an occupational science and therapy perspective, and informed by 'The Bangkok Charter for Health Promotion in a Globalized World', this paper will take a practical approach at delineating the barriers to, challenges, and enablers of, social inclusion and 'participation' towards occupational justice.

Contribution to the practice:

This paper will contribute to the growing body of evidence on occupational therapy's role in working with marginalized groups to promote occupational justice at both the person-centered and political levels.