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Facilitating the Workforce Success of Internationally Educated Occupational Therapists: Strategies and Initiatives

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Introduction:

An increasingly globalized world has resulted in greater mobility of the occupational therapy workforce. For the reasons of better economic prospects, social opportunity or pure adventure, many occupational therapists seek employment in other countries. Unfortunately not all are successful. As a profession that enables engagement in occupations of necessity or choice, we need to address issues that impede the successful workforce integration of internationally educated occupational therapists (IEOTs).

Objectives:

This presentation will provide an overview of initiatives undertaken to recognize barriers, address identified issues and implement initiatives to assist IEOTs with working as occupational therapists in Canada.

Description:

An environmental scan identified a number of barriers faced by IEOTs in Canada and prioritized directions for action. Action to address these issues was coordinated among the many groups interested in the workforce success of IEOTs, including professional associations, regulators, educators, governments and international graduates.

Results:

Identified barriers to workforce integration included difficulties associated with obtaining accurate information about working in Canada, meeting entry-to-practice requirements and linking with the occupational therapy community for peer support and networking. An access and registration framework was developed to identify IEOT pathways to successful practice and highlight critical points for resources and intervention. A web portal was established as a central information source, with links to relevant organizations and resources, including video profiles of IEOTs successfully working in Canada. A preparation program to assist IEOTs with meeting entry-to-practice requirements was implemented in sites across the country. Changes were made to the national certification examination to reduce barriers that may hinder IEOT performance. Finally, an online mentoring gateway was established to assist networking among IEOTs and other occupational therapists in Canada.

Conclusion:

Systemic factors may hinder the workforce success of IEOTs. Targeted initiatives were necessary to ensure we enable the productive occupation of IEOTs in Canada.

Contribution to Practice:

The work undertaken in Canada may inform initiatives of other countries to welcome and optimize use of our globalizing occupational therapy workforce.