

Optimising Occupational Therapy Services for People with Chronic Pain in Ireland through Participatory Action Research

Blonny Brennan¹, Oriel Corcoran², Bindu Irudayaraj², Valerie Kelley³, Katie Robinson⁴, Sinead Vine⁵, Eimear Lyons⁴, Siun Kearney⁴

¹*St. Vincents University Hospital, Dublin 4, Ireland,* ²*Waterford Regional Hospital, Waterford, Ireland,*

³*The Adelaide, Meath and National Children's Hospital, Tallaght Dublin 24, Ireland,* ⁴*University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland,* ⁵*University College Hospital, Galway, Ireland*

Introduction

Chronic pain affects one in five Europeans and the consequences of chronic pain for occupational performance and quality of life are vast. Occupational therapists have much to offer in addressing the occupational needs of people with chronic pain.

Objectives

This paper will describe the first stage of a participatory action research (PAR) project initiated by a national group of Irish occupational therapists (AIOTCP; Alliance of Irish Occupational Therapists in Chronic Pain). The aim of this initial stage is to rigorously describe and deconstruct current occupational therapy practice in Ireland with people with chronic pain.

Methods

The chosen project design is PAR, which has been identified as an appropriate methodology where the research aim is the development or redesign of healthcare. Qualitative in-depth interviews with the Alliance of Irish Occupational Therapists in Chronic Pain group members were completed. The interview schedule was developed by the participants and an independent researcher completed the interviews. The in-depth interviews were focused on the everyday practice of participants, theoretical and philosophical influences on practice, the context of service provision and the nature of services provided.

Results

Following transcription, thematic analysis was utilised to condense and describe the data. The findings of this analysis describe in a comprehensive manner the contemporary occupational therapy practice of this national group. These findings will be presented in light of critical reflections upon the professional philosophy of occupational therapy.

Conclusion

This study describes the initial stage of a participatory action research cycle and describes how reflecting upon current occupational therapy practice can guide the development and optimisation of occupational therapy services.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy.

This participatory study offers a model for the development of occupational therapy services. The rigorous description of occupational therapy practice in Ireland with people with chronic pain and the critical reflections upon this practice offers much to practicing occupational therapists in considering how evidence and philosophy inform practice.