

0220

Is Occupational Science Useful?

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Introduction

A number of scholars have examined the increase in occupational science publications, its spread from its original home at the University of Southern California to other countries, and the concepts occupational scientists have discussed. More recently, there has been debate of its philosophical and theoretical underpinnings. Less attention has been paid to whether occupational science is fulfilling its promise of informing occupational therapy. In this presentation I outline research into occupation, undertaken by occupational therapists, which relates to recognised health concerns; the abandonment of assistive devices; and how occupational therapists might work with mental health consumers, vulnerable populations, people from other cultures and children with disabilities.

Objective

To explore the application of occupational science findings within occupational therapy practice.

Description

The examples include:

- bringing the concept of occupational deprivation to residential care of the elderly
- finding out what kinds of meanings occupation holds
- uncovering the meaning of cooking for elderly women
- understanding the meaning of everyday objects
- how occupation is experienced in recovery from severe and enduring mental illness
- the inclusion of boys with developmental coordination disorder in gymnastics
- how occupation is affected by migrating to a foreign country.

Discussion

The discussion reveals how occupational science findings have reformed life in a residential care setting, restored patients to the community, raised questions about prescribing assistive devices, shown how to care for people who are acutely unwell, and been used to forge relationships with people in war torn countries. Concern is raised, however, about whether occupational science is accessible to practicing therapists.

Conclusion

I conclude that individual occupational therapists are applying occupational science findings in practice, and suggest that they share their experiences with other therapists. I also argue that to have maximum impact, occupational scientists need to research everyday occupations, particularly those of occupational therapy's main client groups.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy

The presentation gives seven illustrative examples of knowledge about occupation that has opened new practice responses or been applied in practice. I urge therapists to lobby for access to occupational science literature.