

Continuing professional development: An Obligatory occupation?

Annette Rivard

University of Alberta, Alberta, Canada

Introduction: The very nature of professionalism includes "a sense of responsibility for our patients, to keep up-to-date in terms of ... competence and ... knowledge" (Jones & Green, p. 940). From a professional point of view, occupational therapists are accountable for meeting the standards that dictate their practice irrespective of the context and the specific demands of their work environment. Previous studies however have suggested that occupational therapists in North America sometimes expect their employer to support CPE in both informal and formal ways, including funding and release time. The literature also suggests that employers often view CPE as a discretionary activity that professionals choose to participate in, and as such do not include it in formal employment contracts.

Objectives: This presentation addresses the following questions: Does the construct of professionalism subsume 'obligatory' continuing education? Or is CPE a discretionary occupation that therapists may or may not choose to undertake?

Methods: A questionnaire containing a recognized professional commitment (PC) scale (Meyer & Allen, 1993) and several closed and open-ended questions about CPE involvement was sent to 2200 Canadian occupational therapists. Responses were analyzed using hierarchical regression and grounded theory methodology.

Results: Level of professional commitment predicted significant differences in CPE enactment, regardless of employer support. A surprisingly large number of respondents however reported that lack of employer support resulted in their not participating in CPE activities. Many reasons were provided that merit consideration, discussion and resolution for the benefit of individual professionals, employing organizations, and most importantly, patients and clients.

Conclusion: CPE is a shared responsibility between individual professions and their employers. However the profession's expectation that members will maintain competence (via CPE) demands that individuals be self-initiated and self-directed in this occupation, regardless of their work context.

Contribution to practice: CPE is increasingly important given the contextual structures, systems, politics, and economics of our times. The potential impact of inadequate professional development is that: a) clients and patients may not receive optimal occupational therapy, and b) dollars spent on occupational therapy services and education may not be put to the best possible use.