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STUDENT SUPERVISION: ISSUES FOR NOVICE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS

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Introduction

Fieldwork education is an important component of the education of health professionals. It is largely dependent on the provision of student supervision by practicing therapists who must balance the concurrent demands of client care and student supervision. An increasing number of new graduate occupational therapists are being expected to undertake student supervision to meet the increasing number of students seeking fieldwork placements. However, there is limited research exploring the experience of providing student supervision for new graduate occupational therapists, who themselves are operating within a phase of learning and development of clinical competencies.

Objectives

This study aimed to investigate the experience of beginning occupational therapy supervisors at a large acute and rehabilitation hospital in metropolitan Melbourne. The study also sought to identify supports that could be used to enable new therapists to undertake the supervisory role with undergraduate students.

Methods

Four in-depth individual interviews and a focus group were held with grade one occupational therapists working at the hospital. The data was analysed thematically and an iterative process was used to develop themes from the categories of data.

Results

The new graduate occupational therapists' experience of undertaking the role of student supervision at a time when they were in a phase of learning and development themselves was both rewarding and challenging. Three themes that emerged from the data were: being a novice therapist; getting supervision right; and the need for support and supervision within these dual roles.

Conclusion, Contribution to the practice /evidence base of occupational therapy

There is a need to ensure adequate information is provided to new graduate therapists to more fully understand the role of student supervisor and to impart the skills required for student supervision. Additional support by their senior therapists and peers is desired by the new graduate occupational therapist undertaking this additional role and should be maintained throughout the experience. Finally, a set of structured guidelines provided by the university regarding placement expectations would ease newer therapists' anxiety at undertaking this role.