

**Lessons learned in teaching clinical reasoning to occupational therapy students.**

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**Introduction.** Clinical reasoning is a critical aspect of occupational therapy student education. Because experiential learning is required to develop this skill, it is difficult to teach in a classroom setting. Learning clinical reasoning during fieldwork, however, may be difficult as some supervising therapists have problems articulating their --often tacit-- reasoning, which obscures the reasoning process for students. We developed an on-line course to meet these teaching and learning challenges.

**Objectives.** To describe our experience teaching clinical reasoning using an on-line medium.

**Description.** The clinical reasoning course is concurrent with the students' first fieldwork placement. It involves self-directed study and faculty-facilitated, small group, on-line discussions. Learning is enhanced through student-initiated discussions with their fieldwork preceptors. We have found that the difference between student and therapist reasoning needs to be carefully considered when communicating clinical reasoning concepts. The challenges to student learning include lack of experience and knowledge to draw upon, and potential differences in clinical reasoning styles between preceptors and students. Novice students need guidance to reflect on their thinking and that of their preceptors. They need suggestions about how to question preceptors respectfully, especially when preceptors are unaware of the reasoning strategies they employ. They need assistance so that they do not confuse the actions of assessment and intervention with the thinking processes that guide these actions.

**Results/Discussion.** This course has been successful in teaching clinical reasoning to students. The lessons we have learned contribute to its ongoing refinement. Teaching clinical reasoning to students while they are on fieldwork helps them to understand the "why" of their preceptors' actions, analyze client situations with greater insight, guide their client interactions and problem-solving, and enhance their self-reflection. This course could easily be integrated into other occupational therapy curricula.

**Conclusion.** An on-line course in clinical reasoning, concurrent with fieldwork placement and facilitated by university faculty, addresses the challenges of teaching this topic to students.

**Contribution to the Practice/Evidence Base of Occupational Therapy.** Clinical reasoning is informed in part by evidence-based practice and clinical experience, and is critical in translating evidence into practice.