

0384

Occupational therapy: a human rights profession? Exploring occupational therapy practice and taking action to enable occupational justice

Danika Galvin

Charles Sturt University, Albury, NSW, Australia

Introduction: This paper reports on the research process and preliminary findings of an Australian action research project that investigated the application of occupation, occupational justice, and human rights in occupational therapy practice. This research began with questioning from within occupational therapy about the profession's objectives, and specifically, the call for occupational therapists to meet wider community needs and to acknowledge human rights in practice. Whilst enabling occupation and occupational justice have previously been profiled in the profession, it is less clear how occupational therapists achieve these aims in their everyday practice, particularly in traditional health care contexts.

Objectives: Three main questions are considered: (1) how do occupational therapists understand occupational and human rights issues affecting everyday practice; (2) what conditions constrain or support occupational therapists in enabling occupation and occupational justice; and (3) what actions can occupational therapists take in order to practice ethically and wisely?

Methods: Over the course of one year, eight occupational therapists practicing in a range of acute hospital and community settings, participated in individual interviews and monthly focus groups. Within this community of practice they reflected upon their everyday practices and more closely aligned their practice with the profession's philosophy of enabling occupation and justice. Narrative data were gathered and analysed qualitatively.

Results: This paper reports on the often taken-for-granted moral dimensions of occupational therapy practice. It illuminates how occupational therapists develop practice knowledge about the human rights issues affecting clients and themselves; and explores how occupational therapists can be supported to transform features of the practice context that may otherwise actually further marginalise clients.

Conclusion: This paper discusses how occupational therapists can more fully respect, protect, and fulfil the human rights of their clients, in their everyday practice. Human rights practice will be framed as an outcome of practice, and as embedded within the processes of the occupational therapy profession itself.

Contribution to practice/evidence base of OT: This paper assists in the shaping of the praxis of occupational therapy, through raising consciousness among occupational therapists, about the relationship of human rights to occupational therapy practice.