

Implementing occupation-focused and client-centered assessments in practice: A qualitative study

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Introduction: Despite an emphasis on evidence-based practice and a strong interest in using client-centered assessment tools, occupational therapists appear to find it difficult to incorporate these concepts in practice. In order to map health outcomes as well as find innovative strategies to bridge gaps between research recommendations and constraints within clinical settings, it is vital to know what factors impact upon the implementation of client-centered measurement tools in practice.

Objective: The aim of this study is to explore occupational therapist's experiences about using client-centered assessments in clinical practice.

Method: Interviews and observations were conducted with 15 occupational therapists who were trained to use the Assessment of Motor and Process Skills (AMPS) and the Assessment of Awareness of Disability (AAD). Both the AMPS and AAD require extensive training; participants were therefore considered to be well positioned to share possibilities and hinders about implementation. Data were recorded and transcribed verbatim, then thematically analyzed. The study was approved by the local ethics committee.

Results: Preliminary results suggest that socio-environmental factors, such as a community of peers or mutually respectful team context, have a great impact on the implementation of client-centered assessments in practice. Therapists are often eager to honor client wishes and to focus on occupation-based interventions, however there is a strong need for an environment in which this enthusiasm can be shared. Without openness from other team members to take in other perspectives, assessments seem to lose priority and become labor-intensive procedures that do not sufficiently translate to interventions and the client's future plans.

Conclusion: Client-centered practice is deeply embedded in organizational cultures, and its implementation is thus tied to individual therapist's skills as much as to the social structures of their working context. Implementation requires a multi-fold process of training therapists in the use of tools as well as creating systemic changes in organizations, where the value of using such methods is shared amongst all staff.

Contribution to practice: This study is relevant in creating better guidelines to implement client-centered assessments and interventions in practice, thus also contributing to better outcome measures in occupational therapy practice.