

Efficacy of client centred occupational therapy in Multiple Sclerosis; A cluster randomised trial

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Introduction: Occupational therapy (OT) is an integral part of the care for patients with MS (Multiple Sclerosis). Currently, there is a movement towards a client-centred approach in OT. The theoretical benefit is that therapy is tailored to the patient's needs and will therefore result in a bigger improvement in autonomy and quality of life than regular OT. However, so far this theoretical advantage has not been established in scientific research.

Objectives: This study describes a cluster-randomised trial investigating the efficacy of client-centred OT based on a specific client-centred method as compared to usual care OT, in patients with Multiple Sclerosis (MS).

Method: Hospitals and rehabilitation centres which treat MS patients in an outpatient setting are randomised into the experimental or control group. Therapists in the experimental group received a course in client-centred treatment. Subsequently, they treat MS patients accordingly. Therapists in the control group provide usual care.

Measurements are taken at baseline, 4 months and at 8 months follow-up. Outcome assessment primarily takes place at the patient level. Primary outcome measures include disability (DIP) and participation and autonomy (IPA). Secondary outcomes include client-centred outcomes, dexterity, generic health-related quality of life, fatigue, pain and cognitive functioning.

Differences in change scores between the two interventions will be compared at baseline, 4 and 8 months. The patient's experience with the treatment process is evaluated at 4 months. Demographic variables, disease characteristics and the EDSS of the participating patients will be compared between the experimental and control groups to verify prognostic comparability at the baseline. Multi-level analyses will be used to identify patient, therapist and institution characteristics associated with successful client-centred practice.

Results / Conclusion: In total, 27 therapists of 13 health centers and 278 patients are participating. This project has started in May 2007. In October 2009 the final follow-up measurements will be done and we will be able to present the results of this study.

Contribution to practice: This study delivers important knowledge for occupational therapy practice and for educational programs because it provides information about characteristics associated with client centered therapy.