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Client Involvement in Mental Health Service Planning

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Introduction: The involvement of clients in the development and evaluation of mental health services is recognized as a right of citizenship and as a means to improve services. Despite support for this involvement, the mechanisms to facilitate meaningful involvement are not well understood. Occupational therapy managers and administrators can benefit from tools to guide the development and evaluation of involvement mechanisms.

Objectives: This study aimed to explore the perspectives of people who use mental health services about how they would like to be involved in service planning and to develop a tool to guide the implementation and evaluation of involvement mechanisms.

Methods: The study unfolded in two phases. Phase 1 involved individual and group interviews with 63 people from three diverse communities who were users of mental health services. Participants provided their perspectives about their involvement in service planning and evaluation as well as the organizational practices that enable involvement. Interviews were analyzed through inductive qualitative analysis resulting in a conceptual framework of effective involvement processes. Phase 2 consisted of drafting a tool for implementing and evaluating client involvement based on the results of Phase 1 and an extensive review of the literature. Seven participants from Phase 1 reviewed the tool and provided feedback through in-depth interviews. The tool was refined based on the qualitative analysis of these interviews.

Results: The tool consists of five dimensions of involvement. It includes multiple criteria that focus on the structures and processes that create an environment conducive to client involvement.

Conclusions: The tool can be used by managers and administrators in occupational therapy departments and mental health organizations to develop and evaluate mechanisms that enable the inclusion of clients as partners in mental health service development and evaluation.

Contribution to Occupational Therapy: The client-centred practice of occupational therapy emphasizes the participation of clients in decisions about their individual care and the services they receive. This tool guides the process of finding meaningful ways to include client voice in mental health service planning. Inclusion of client voice can promote social participation of clients and improve service decisions that impact on this vulnerable population.