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An exploration of best practices in the use of client interviews to develop clinical reasoning skills in student occupational therapists

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Introduction

A number of challenges exist when using student interviews of clients to develop clinical reasoning skills in the classroom, including logistical demands, low instructor control over case content, and difficulty exposing learners to all levels of clinical reasoning. This study examined the differential effects of standardized patients versus authentic volunteer clients in developing clinical reasoning skills in two cohorts of occupational therapy students.

Objectives

During this session the presenters will: provide a rationale for use of client interviews to develop clinical reasoning; present one structured methodology for promoting clinical reasoning; describe a cohort study comparing student clinical reasoning learning outcomes using standardized patients versus volunteers with disabilities for a structured interview assignment

Methods

Two cohorts of students were presented with the same interview assignment, which included videotaping, structured feedback, and self-reflection. One cohort interviewed volunteers with real disabilities, the other standardized patients with case histories developed by local clinicians and course instructors. Comparisons were done using student surveys and blinded content analysis of student reflective assignments. Outcome variables included the range of reasoning types addressed, the level of challenge, and student opinions concerning learning benefits of the assignment.

Results

This cohort study compared student clinical reasoning learning outcomes achieved using standardized patients versus volunteers with disabilities for a structured interview assignment. Results reveal a number of qualitative differences in the student experience, and provide guidance for how to structure an interview-based learning experience to maximally stimulate development of student reasoning prior to advanced fieldwork and practice.

Conclusions

Viable strategies exist for promoting clinical reasoning development in the context of academic coursework. Incorporation of approaches that integrate fieldwork and classroom instruction can build bridges between academic and clinical faculty, and increase student confidence relative to clinical practice.

Contributions to practice/evidence base of OT

Results inform educational strategies and add to knowledge of how to move students through novice and advanced beginner levels of clinical reasoning prior to their final fieldwork experience and entry-to-practice. Involvement of clinicians in case development helps integrate academic courses and fieldwork learning.