

On the present situation and subsequent task of psychiatric occupational therapy in Korea

Yoon-Jeong Eom, Hiroshi Yamane
Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan

< Introduction> Mental Health Law in Korea was partially amended in March 2009. Until now occupational therapy has not been specified in Mental Health Law, the amended Mental Health Law stipulated the provision of occupational therapy in mental hospitals for the first time. In the past, work treatment, which is similar to occupational therapy, has been performed by specialized mental health staff i.e. social workers and nurses. From now on it is necessary to clarify differences and distinctions between the role and function of those specialized staff and occupational therapists.

< Objectives> The purpose of this report is to develop recognition of occupational therapy in Mental Health Law by analyzing the present situation of occupational therapy in Korea.

< Description/Report> Korea's amended Mental Health Law still has many problems. First of all, the bill in question includes provisions for compulsory hospitalization with a custodian's consent, and it takes long time to get discharge permission. Second, the role of occupational therapy and the occupational therapist is not clearly defined, activities are limited to simple work such as crafts. Further, occupational therapy is indicated as 'Jak-Eob-Yo-Beob(work treatment)' which sounds like unscientific treatment. The formal name in Korean is 'Jak-Eob-Chi-Ryo (occupational therapy)', but both terms are used inappropriately.

< Results/Discussion> The educational system is not completely arranged yet and government agencies do not fully understand the role and ability of occupational therapy. Therefore, we can consider subsequent tasks as follows. Firstly, it is necessary to indicate the role and function of occupational therapy as practiced by an occupational therapist. Secondly, an investigation into ways of cooperating with other mental health staff is required. Finally, the educational system should be in good condition to cultivate qualified psychiatric occupational therapists. For that reason, occupational therapy in Korea should adjust itself to its own culture as well as referring to the present state of practice in foreign countries.

< Contribution to the practice> Ensuring those people involved in delivery of mental health services understand occupational therapy will assist in improving treatment to mentally handicapped persons as well as in perfecting mental health practice.