

The new role of an occupational therapist as a community volunteer

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【Introduction】 The Volunteer Center of Nagano Social Welfare Foundation (publicly funded NPO) invited an occupational therapist (OT) to join the board of managerial committee of volunteer organizations registered at the center in 2003. The purpose of this article is to introduce volunteer activities and to describe the new role of an OT as a community volunteer.

【Role of OT】 The board consists of 20 citizen volunteers, representing specialists in different areas, such as a journalist, a free-lance writer, a Buddhist priest, a director of the Parent-Teacher Associations, a professor in community development, a member of the Nagano City Board of Education, representatives from registered volunteer groups, and so on.

The expected role of an OT during the first 2-3 years has been focused on overall planning and management of the Volunteer Center programs. The OT has worked as a technical advisor to recommend and suggest ways to design and/or implement activity programs for community resident with different needs. This includes planning and coordinating volunteer training sessions, promoting welfare education in the Nagano City school system, providing counseling for "Life Phone Services" volunteer operators.

At present, including the last 2-3 years, the expected role of an OT is being shifted to provide direct learning experiences to different needs of population groups in the community. This involves conducting lectures and workshops on "communication through occupation" in various volunteer promotion classes, giving lectures of occupational therapy on career education for high school students, planning and executing of a continuing educational program of "health through occupation" for the retired baby-boomer generation, and providing occupation-oriented group experiences for fragile elderly people in the local community.

【Conclusion】 The basic knowledge and skills of OT reinforced by occupation oriented clinical practice focused on persons with disabilities provide a useful and effective strategy to work with non-disabled population in the community. The role of OT in the community is to provide learning opportunities to discover the meaning and value of daily life occupations to enrich and empower people's health and life.