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Occupational therapy entry-level education: An international challenge

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Introduction

Currently, in Canada and the United States, the entry level to professional occupational therapy practice is a Master's degree in occupational therapy; elsewhere in the world either a baccalaureate degree or a diploma is the entry level requirement. The rationale for and the outcomes of this change is widely understood. Furthermore the impact on practice and clients needs to be examined. This paper is meant to stimulate discussion of the ramifications for the continued viability of the profession.

Objectives

The objectives of this paper are to present current evidence regarding: 1) the differences in professional practice ascribed to each level of educational preparation, and 2) how the development of a master's level entry-level education differences in professional practice ascribed to differences in level of educational preparation has benefited (or not) the occupational therapy profession.

Description

A systematic review and synthesis of the educational, health professional and occupational therapy literature describing, comparing and examining the preparation of entry-level professionals will be undertaken to determine the similarities and differences in practice between the graduates entering the health profession from different levels of education. The analysis will also examine the impact of different entry-levels on the viability of the health profession. The current evidence will be interpreted and presented to generate further discussion and to refine the guidelines related to educational preparation of occupational therapists.

Results

An analysis of the educational, health professional and occupational therapy evidence will be presented in respect to similarities and differences in health care professional practice including occupational therapy practice among different 'levels' of education. In addition a possible role for the WFOT in providing guidelines for the future education of occupational therapists will be discussed.

Conclusion

The results of this analysis will enable further discussion and decisions regarding the merits, or otherwise, of advanced degrees for entry level into the occupational therapy health profession.

Contribution

This paper will present information useful to the viability of the profession linked to educational programs. Perhaps it will generate thoughtful dialogue around future developments of occupational therapy education.