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Qualitative Systematic reviews in occupational therapy. Can they contribute to the evidence based?

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Introduction

Internationally there has been considerable debate regarding the position of qualitative research within evidence based occupational therapy practice. Whilst most therapists and academics are aware of systematic reviews and meta-analysis little attention has been paid to qualitative research within systematic reviews in occupational therapy. Systematic reviews are a synthesis of research on a given topic that involves locating, appraising and synthesising the evidence

Objectives

To present the initial development stages of a qualitative systematic review including the decision making process involved in conducting a systematic thematic synthesis of older adults' perceptions and experiences of pre-discharge home visits in acute care hospitals.

Method:

Search Strategy: Electronic searching of the Allied and Complementary Medicine 1985 to November 2008, British Nursing Index 1994 to November 2008, Cinahl 1982 to April November 2008, Embase 1974 to November 2008, Kings Fund 1979 to November 2008, Medline 1950 to November 2008, and the Cochrane Library databases to November 2008. We also hand searched conference proceedings and contacted universities and occupational therapy professional bodies within Europe, Australia and North America.

Results:

45 studies (30 published, 15 unpublished) were initially identified, 14 studies (7 published, 7 unpublished) were selected for detailed screening; however none of the papers met the inclusion criteria. Three papers reporting on qualitative studies were found but did not meet the quality criteria.

Contribution to the practice / evidence base of occupational therapy

This study has highlighted the valuable impact which qualitative systematic reviews can have on practice and should be used by clinicians in practice to facilitate evidence based decision making. Incorporating qualitative research into the evidence base has the potential to make an important contribution as it brings with it the client's perspective of a problem, issues or a treatment. However qualitative researchers need to ensure that studies are of a sufficient quality so that they can be incorporated into a systematic review. This review found no studies of sufficient methodology quality that have explored older adults' experiences and perceptions of pre-discharge home visits.