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Is there a revival of occupational therapy in Myanmar?

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Myanmar (erstwhile Burma), a country in Southeast Asia, has a population of approximately 50 million. Although it is blessed with comparatively rich natural resources, it is not economically and socially developed, and it is classified as a developing country in the lower middle levels.

Since August 2008, I have been engaged in a technical cooperation project aimed at improving the rehabilitation service of the Myanmar national rehabilitation hospital (NRH).

The NRH is the only specialized rehabilitation hospital having 50 beds; for the past 50 years, it has been providing rehabilitation services for thousands of patients every year. The rehabilitation treatment section comprises a physical treatment room, a movement exercise room, an adult OT room, and a children's OT room; physical therapists (PTs) are assigned to each section. Although the rooms are referred to as "OT room," OT is not conducted here; these rooms are used for functional exercises and postural trainings.

In Myanmar, PT education was started many decades ago; at present, Myanmar has three degree courses and one masters course. Currently, several hundred PTs practice mainly in public and private hospitals. In contrast, no OT education program has been introduced, and the NRH and some other major hospitals have "OT" rooms, where PTs provide functional exercises and a few activities of daily living (ADL) exercises.

Nevertheless, when the NRH was first started, occupational therapists were engaged in children's "OT" and adult "OT." In the corners of these rooms, one can still find the handiworks of patients and the treatment materials used by therapists, such as templates for splints and pegboards. These suggest that occupational activities used to be performed in those days.

Both PT and OT were introduced at the beginning of the 50 years of the development of rehabilitation in Myanmar. Since then, the field of PT has been developing; unfortunately, however, OT has not developed simultaneously. In the present report, I consider the reasons for such differences in the development of the fields of PT and OT, and then discuss the perspectives for OT development in Myanmar.