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Preparing occupational therapy graduates to work in aged care: An examination of educational needs.

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Introduction: Older adults often have multiple health problems which impact their ability to complete daily occupations. Occupational therapists work with this age group to facilitate functional performance and engagement in occupations. The ageing population, in combination with the valued role of occupational therapy in this area of practice, is likely to result in a higher proportion of occupational therapists working with older adults in the future. Programs providing occupational therapy education need to ensure that graduates are adequately prepared during their training to provide competent practice in aged care.

Objectives: This study was undertaken to define the characteristics of the occupational therapy graduate who is equipped to commence a career in aged care. It also explored how this could be achieved through education and experience.

Methods: Australian occupational therapists with experience in aged care were surveyed to identify the necessary knowledge, skills and professional behaviours required by new graduates to work in this area of practice. Information gathered from the survey was analysed and then presented to a focus group for confirmation and further clarification.

Results: Therapists were able to identify key skills, knowledge and professional behaviours required for competent practice in aged care. Interestingly, therapists identified that competency for clinical practice in aged care may, in fact, not be entirely achievable from university training.

Conclusion: There is likely to be an increased demand for occupational therapists to work with older adults in the future. New graduates need to have specific attributes to be able to competently work in this area. Occupational therapy educational programs can target development of required knowledge, skills and professional behaviours to prepare graduates.

Contribution to occupational therapy: This presentation will be relevant to educators, new graduates and therapists who supervise staff. Educators and new graduates will obtain a current understanding of the knowledge, skills and professional behaviours required by new graduates to work in aged care. Supervising staff will obtain an insight into where to target supervision and professional development in new graduates working in aged care.