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Is Length of Experience an Appropriate Criterion to Identify Level of Expertise?

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Introduction: Clinical experience plays an important role in the development of expertise, particularly when coupled with reflection on practice. There is debate, however, regarding the amount of clinical experience that is required to become an expert. Various lengths of practice have been suggested as suitable for determining expertise, ranging from 5 years to 15 years.

Objective: This study aimed to investigate the association between length of experience and therapists' level of expertise in the field of cerebral palsy with upper limb hypertonicity using an empirical procedure named Cochrane-Weiss-Shanteau (CWS).

Methods: The methodology involved re-analysis of quantitative data collected in two previous studies. In Study One, 18 experienced occupational therapists made hypothetical clinical decisions related to 110 case vignettes, while in Study Two, 29 therapists considered 60 case vignettes drawn randomly from those used in Study One. A CWS index was calculated for each participant's case decisions. Then, in each study, Spearman's rho was calculated to identify the correlations between the duration of experience and level of expertise.

Results and Conclusion: The results demonstrated of no significant association between the duration of experience and level of expertise. These results corroborated previous findings of no association between length of experience and judgmental performance. Therefore, length of experience may not be an appropriate criterion for determining level of expertise in relation to cerebral palsy practice. These finding may have application in clinical decision making training and research.