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Entrepreneurial occupational therapy students: stepping outside of the box

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At the WFOT Congress 2006 Pattison in her keynote speech encouraged us to 'move beyond the traditional boundaries...and apply our core (OT) skills in more sophisticated and most importantly effective ways; this paper aims to discuss how Northumbria University has been developing marketing and entrepreneurial skills in student occupational therapists.

In order to help new graduates meet the demands of an ever changing workforce a module was designed to develop students understanding and confidence in developing and marketing the benefits of occupation in a variety of contexts. Students are expected to draw upon their understanding about occupational therapy's professional philosophy and their own developing professional identity. Throughout the module students explore the range and variety of contexts in which an occupational therapist may be effective in enhancing and facilitating occupational performance.

Students explore and critique the contexts which impact on occupational performance and debate the opportunities and barriers to professional practice. They explore the future of the profession; management and leadership skills, marketing strategies and entrepreneurial approaches. The module accumulates in a student presentation where they are required to 'sell' occupational therapy to a new non-government organisation.

The paper will draw on feedback from two cohorts of students, academic staff and professionals from local organisations that have contributed to the development of the module. Early module evaluations indicate that the students have developed their understanding of the use of occupation, have a clearer professional identity and feel more confident in promoting their skills.

In conclusion the paper will explore the diversity in employment opportunities and discuss how best to equip future therapists with the required skills and confidence to promote both themselves and the profession (Withers and Shann 2008)

References

Pattison M (2006) OT - outstanding talent: an entrepreneurial approach to practice. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 53(3), pp.166-172

Withers C, Shann S (2008) Embracing opportunities: stepping out of the box. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 71(3), 122 - 124.