

Back to basics : a prioritization system for generalist therapists

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Introduction - Remote generalist therapists face the unique challenge of providing service to all populations and prioritizing referrals across diverse practice areas. Prioritization systems are typically developed for use with specific client populations and practice settings, however, few tools intended for community based generalist occupational therapists exist. The New Brunswick Extra-Mural program considers the impact of illness or injury on occupational performance as the determinant for prioritization (Government of New Brunswick, 2004). This presentation expands on this concept to argue that referrals should not be prioritized by diagnosis, and proposes a model for prioritizing by level of occupational performance.

Objectives - Establish a system of prioritization which ensures clients are seen in order of urgency that is grounded in occupational therapy theory and can be applied to all client populations.

Description - Literature regarding established prioritization systems was reviewed. A system which prioritizes clients by degree of impact on occupational performance was piloted in a remote generalist community based practice. The system allows therapists to take contextual factors such as environment, social conditions, geographical remoteness, access to client, and clinical reasoning into consideration when prioritizing referrals. Therapists' satisfaction and caseload composition was evaluated post pilot period.

Results- The prioritization system created continuity and consistency between therapists across a region. Therapists reported increased satisfaction and the system contributed to improved caseload management. Additionally, the system enabled therapists to justify to clients and referral sources the position of a referral on the waitlist while providing education about the role of occupational therapy.

Conclusion - The prioritization system successfully organized referrals in a manner that allowed therapists to address client issues in order of urgency and that is consistent with occupational therapy theory about occupational performance.

Contribution to the practice of occupational therapy - A prioritization system based on occupational performance allows generalist occupational therapists to evaluate referrals of varying diagnoses and ensure that the most pressing client issues are addressed first.

Reference: Government of New Brunswick (2004). New Brunswick Extra-Mural Occupational Therapy Preferred Practice. New Brunswick, Canada: Author.