

Realising the vision: turning desire for occupation-focused practice into reality

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Introduction: Some occupational therapists have experienced difficulty in being able to accurately explain occupational therapy to others. Therapists have also expressed concern that the occupational therapy profession has not been accorded the regard that it deserves. These are deeply disturbing problems. In this paper I propose a somewhat equally disturbing solution: therapists can be unconsciously complicit with the medical, scientific, and fiscal discourses that sometimes dominate health settings and therefore they may unwittingly contribute to the subjugation and poor representation of the profession.

Objectives: This paper describes the findings of a study of occupational therapy practice in Australia. It encourages therapists to make small changes to their practice that can have dramatic positive outcomes in regard to better promotion of occupational therapy and increased satisfaction for therapists.

Methods: Over the course of 18 months, 15 occupational therapists and a researcher joined together in a collaborative action research that explored and critiqued occupational therapy practice in a hospital. Using 2 cycles of reflection, discussion, action, and re-evaluation the therapists made changes to the way they thought about, talked about, and enacted their practice.

Results: The therapists came to realise that they played a significant part in the suppression of occupational therapy in the hospital through the language they used and the actions they took (and failed to take); they perpetuated the image of occupational therapy as being about "function" rather than about "occupation" and they tended to comply with hospital protocols rather than question if these procedures were really advancing the occupational aims of the patients they worked with.

Conclusion: The therapists realised that they preferred their practice to be more occupation-focused and so they took action to bring this type of practice into reality. As a consequence the therapists experienced an increased sense of professional esteem and confidence and they felt more satisfied with their work.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy: This study highlights a problem that may occur in many occupational therapy services. It also outlines a potential solution, and as such has much to offer in enabling other therapists to overcome similar hurdles.