

Developing occupational therapy and occupational perspectives in the North West Region of Cameroon: Reflections on 5 years of partnership in rehabilitation.

Goli Hashemi^{1,2}, Lynn Cockburn¹, Kate Suffling¹, Kristina Wilson³, Peter Mue⁴, Ezekiel Benuh⁵, Simon Yuh⁵, Petra Muso⁶, Julius Wango⁷

¹*Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy and The International Centre for Disability and Rehabilitation, University Of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada,* ²*Baylor Institute for Rehabilitation, Dallas, Texas, United States,* ³*Vancouver Coastal Health at Vancouver General Hospital, Vancouver, BC, Canada,* ⁴*Christian Blind Mission, Yaounde, Cameroon,* ⁵*Services for People with Disabilities, Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Board, Bamenda, North West Region, Cameroon,* ⁶*SAJOCAH, Bafut, North West Region, Cameroon,* ⁷*Bamenda Coordinating Centre for Studies in Disability and Rehabilitation, Bamenda, North West Region, Cameroon*

Introduction: Over the past 5 years, a group of occupational therapists and rehabilitation professionals from the University of Toronto, Canada have been partnering with local organizations in the North West Region (NWR) of Cameroon to provide direct OT services, pilot projects, and develop plans for occupationally-based service, education, and research in the area. To date, no resident occupational therapist has been identified in the NWR and there is no recognized occupational therapy educational program in the country. **Objective:** The goal of this paper is to share information about the emerging occupational therapy and occupationally focused rehabilitation practices in the NWR of Cameroon, with the hope of developing relationships with OTs in other parts of the world. **Description:** The paper will provide a summary of the various strategies and approaches used to gather information, perform needs assessments, and provide OT services in this region of Cameroon. This presentation will include the outcomes of surveys and focus groups on how occupational therapy is developing a presence, and the impact to date. We will summarize how occupational therapists are working with other health, social service and education providers to influence practice and policy. We will also describe the challenges in selecting and developing models of practice that are relevant and appropriate to the area. **Discussion:** Several people have recognized the contributions that OT can make to the community through improving the lives of people with disabilities, provision of rehabilitation, and health promotion. Ongoing discussion and critique is vital for the development of the profession in this area. **Conclusion:** This experience has shown that there is a need and potential for occupational therapy services in this region. **Contributions to practice:** The approaches used by this group may serve to further develop occupational therapy programs and research in the NWR of Cameroon, other regions of Cameroon and in Africa. Potential next steps will also be discussed.