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Occupational Therapy in Cuba

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Introduction

In the spring of 2007 the author spent a month in Guantanamo, in the Eastern Province of Cuba, investigating the development, teaching and practice of occupational therapy in that region.

Objectives

To gain an insight into the development of occupational therapy practice, training in the profession and service delivery.

Description

The author was invited to partake in a course entitled 'Proyecto de Desarrollo de la especialidad de Terapia Ocupacional en Guantánamo'. This four week programme included receiving formal teaching from the course coordinator regarding the principles of occupational therapy practice in Cuba and observing practice in a variety of settings.

Discussion

In Cuba degree courses in occupational therapy have been taught since 1986, these were replaced by a combined 'Health Technology' degree in 2003. This course lasts 5 years and incorporates training in both Occupational Therapy and Social Work.

The focus of occupational therapy treatment in all settings was rehabilitation. In most cases this started in an institutional setting, followed by treatment as an outpatient and finally in community, self led support groups.

A standard initial assessment form was used for all referrals to occupational therapy. Once the assessment has been completed a programme of treatment was established. This treatment was reviewed and amended regularly, usually every 3 to 6 months.

Conclusion

Occupational therapy in Cuba is holistic and patient centred despite the lack of resources apparent in some areas. Patients were often provided with services in their own communities and encouraged to work with others to promote rehabilitation.

The occupational therapists were also qualified in social work and therefore were able to provide a service which incorporated wider aspects of the patients' lives.

Contribution to the practice of occupational therapy

Lessons can be learned from the practice of occupational therapy in Cuba where as a relatively young profession in a country with limited resources it embraces the fundamental and international ethos's of rehabilitation and holistic practice.

Keywords

Regional Histories of Occupational Therapy, International Cooperation, Diversity

Scope/Field

Community and/or Community Work

Age group

Across the life span