

Expectations and Realities of Supervision for Occupational Therapists: Perspectives of Occupational Therapists and Senior Social Workers in One Scottish Local Authority

Jamie McDermott¹, Cherry Rowlings²

¹*Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow, United Kingdom*, ²*University of Stirling, Stirling, United Kingdom*

Introduction

Supervision has been an established component of practice for occupational therapists internationally and is considered essential for staff working in local authority social work services (including occupational therapists), to ensure accountability and the provision of quality services (Scottish Executive, 2005). In Scotland, there are approximately 2500 practicing occupational therapists, twenty five per cent of whom are employed in local authority social work services. However, little is known about the actual process of supervision.

Objectives

This exploratory study was conducted to develop an understanding of the expectations and realities of supervision for local authority occupational therapists where supervision was provided by senior social workers. Perspectives of both occupational therapists and senior social workers were explored.

Methods

Following ethical approval, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the participants and all interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Of the 24 occupational therapists employed within the local authority, 14 were recruited. Of the seven senior social workers with responsibility for supervising occupational therapists, five were recruited. Data analysis was conducted using grounded theory principles (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Results

Analysis of the data relating to the individual experience and reality of supervision highlighted five key themes:

- Supervision as a management function;
- A need for improved planning and organisation;
- Support through colleagues;
- A need to be challenged through reflection;
- A need for additional support.

Conclusion

Occupational therapists' expectations in relation to supervision were not fully met within the supervision arrangements in place. Senior social workers with line management responsibility for occupational therapists also expressed concerns about the supervisory process, and felt unable to challenge practice or to consider practice issues related to occupational therapy.

Contribution to the practice / evidence base of occupational therapy

This study highlights the mismatch between expectations and experiences within the supervisory process for local authority occupational therapists and their supervising senior social workers. Strategies to address this are suggested.

References

Scottish Executive (2005) Improving Front Line Services, Scottish Executive, Edinburgh.

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1990) Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory procedures and Techniques, SAGE, London.