

The Use of Occupation as a Treatment for Impaired Self-awareness

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Introduction: Impaired self-awareness, lack of conscious knowledge of one's abilities and the impact of those abilities on occupation, is the most significant barrier to successful rehabilitation following acquired brain injury (ABI). There are four categories of abilities for which a person needs self-awareness including physical, sensory, cognitive, and psychosocial abilities. Impaired self-awareness is a common problem that affects people of all ages, genders, education levels and socioeconomic statuses following ABI. Among individuals with moderate or severe ABI, as many as 67% suffer long-term deficits in self-awareness (1). Objectives: Participants will learn new evaluation and intervention strategies for self-awareness based on the latest theoretical information and evidence to support the practice of occupational therapy. Description: Self-awareness Enhancement through Learning and Function (SELF) is a newly developed guideline for practice that incorporates the latest neurological findings and learning theories with evidence of the importance of participation in occupation for the recovery of self-awareness. The SELF provides clear evaluation and treatment postulates using therapeutic alliance, occupation, belief perspectives, brain education and compensatory strategies to improve self-awareness. Discussion: The current approach to the treatment of impaired self-awareness focuses on testing and performance feedback. This approach does not have evidence to support the effectiveness and there is some evidence that this approach actually contributes to emotional distress and increased denial of deficits. This new guideline, SELF, provides therapists with an alternate approach that is more effective and incorporates the use of occupation for amelioration of deficits. Conclusion: Occupational therapists should be leaders not only in focusing on occupation as an outcome, but also in the use of participation in occupations as a means for treatment. Contribution to Practice: The SELF provides specific evaluation and treatment strategies for self-awareness and also provides occupational therapists with the latest theoretical information to continue to foster the growth of the profession in the use of occupation in all areas of treatment.

Reference List:

1) Vanderploeg, R.D., Belanger, H.G., Duchnick, J.D., & Curtiss, G. (2007). Awareness problems following moderate to severe traumatic brain injury: Prevalence, assessment methods, and injury correlates. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development*, 44(7), 937-949.