

Systematizing OT: A Necessary Step towards Establishing Evidence

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Introduction

As occupational therapy enters into the realm of evidence based practice, there is an increased need to design empirically based protocols that support therapists' treatment decisions. This presentation will describe the process of ensuring fidelity when designing intervention research. Fidelity is defined as the process of ensuring that the intervention delivered adheres to the intended program.

Objectives

- To identify the preliminary process necessary for the implementation of a randomized clinical trial
- To describe the processes related to ensuring fidelity

Description

Fidelity requires the research team to follow three specific steps: (1) manualizing the intervention, (2) conducting a feasibility study, and (3) further addressing fidelity through (3a) training, (3b) supervision and (3c) monitoring intervention delivery using standardized measures. Manualizing the intervention involves creating detailed descriptions of an intervention approach that therapists are to follow. They are an essential component in clinical trials as they provide structure to the intervention and allow replication. Feasibility studies, a form of pilot studies, are abbreviated versions of an intended intervention and help establish the project's viability. Standardized fidelity tools are designed to measure the adherence to and quality of the intervention proposed in a study.

Discussion

This presentation will provide a review of existing literature on ensuring fidelity and will illustrate the process using examples drawn from an on-going clinical trial of a lifestyle intervention to reduce the incidence of pressure ulcers among individuals with SCI being conducted by the University of Southern California and Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center.

Conclusion

Occupational therapy practice is both client centered and highly individualized, challenges which must be addressed in the design of intervention studies. Ensuring treatment fidelity helps address these challenges, and supports the call for evidence to guide practice.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy

Clinical trials have the potential to greatly enhance the field of occupational therapy. Such research is crucial to demonstrating an intervention's effectiveness and illuminating the mechanisms through which occupation influences health and well-being. Treatment fidelity, involving the processes described in this presentation, is an essential step in designing effective clinical trials.