

Competency standards for Occupational Therapy driver assessors: Implementation and issues related to on-road assessment routes

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Introduction:

Occupational Therapists (OTs) internationally have an important assessment and rehabilitation role assisting individuals with disabilities to gain/retain driving skills necessary to optimize personal independence and occupational participation. Current professional competency standards for OT driver assessors include guidelines for the development of on-road test routes (OT Australia - Victoria, 1998). These guidelines were based on research involving expert practitioners and are currently used for both training and service delivery.

Objectives:

As a first step to the further development of these protocols, this study documented whether assessors applied route design criteria and which specific criteria were used. Opinions regarding items which should be compulsory and how routes could be improved were also collected.

Methods:

OTs were interviewed for this study, recruited via either the professional association or the driver licensing authority. Route details were collected and recorded by reviewing the documented assessment checklist and visual analysis whilst actually driving along the route.

Results:

Twenty two therapists, representing 50% of assessors active in the jurisdiction at the time were interviewed; seven were based outside of urban locations. For clients seeking a geographically unrestricted licence, all OTs reported using a standard test route. Their compliance with standard route design criteria was very high for items designated by the competency standards as "compulsory"; compliance was more variable for items designated as "desirable". For each different type of driving manoeuvre, numbers within a 'standard' route were found to vary. Some rural versus urban differences were noted, with rural routes being generally less complex. OTs' opinions regarding how they might improve their on-road routes reflected these variations in route design.

Conclusions/Contribution to practice:

This study supports the value of establishing competency standards and test criteria for OTs working in driver evaluation. Such protocols are important in supporting the delivery of standard and reliable assessment procedures as well as complying with jurisdictional requirements. The regular review and revision of standards is important to ensure practice reflects current research and is built upon a solid evidence base.

OT Australia - Victoria 1998). Competency Standards for Occupational Therapy Driver Assessors (1st ed.). Melbourne: Author.