

Cognitive assessment for the elderly population: Which assessment and why?

Jane-Maree Paton

Alfred Health, Melbourne, Australia

Introduction:

Occupational Therapist working with older people commonly use standardised cognitive assessments to identify cognitive deficits and predict and measure changes in occupational performance. In practice, there appears to be a lack of consistency in the assessment of cognition with older people. This prompted us to undertake a review of the current literature and its potential implications for practice.

Objectives:

This paper aims to critically review the current evidence regarding standardised assessments of cognition in hospitalised older patients. Details of psychometric properties, normative data specific to older people, and the clinical utility of identified assessments will be outlined in detail.

Description/report:

A literature review of a wide range of databases including MEDLINE, CINAHL, AMED and EMBASE was performed in December 2008.

Results/discussions:

An analysis of the literature suggests that the therapist's choice of cognitive assessment should be based on a consideration of both client and environment; and the clinical utility and theoretical construction of the assessment. It also suggests that assessments should not be used in isolation but in collaboration with other assessments in order to reduce the occurrence of false positives and maximise diagnostic specificity. Drawing on the current literature, a decision tree was created to help therapists consider all relevant information prior to deciding on a cognitive assessment to incorporate in their practice.

Conclusion/Contribution to the practice/EBP of OT:

This review contributes to occupational therapy practice by providing evidence-based selection criteria for cognitive assessments with the elderly population. It is hoped that therapists will use this information to inform the selection of appropriate cognitive assessments for elderly people, ultimately leading to better patient outcomes for this important clinical population.