

1546

Training assessors to enhance program accreditation

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Introduction

A number of member countries in the World Federation of Occupational Therapists use a process of education program accreditation that includes peer review. In Australia, the peer review process is one aspect of the occupational therapy entry-level program accreditation process undertaken by the professional association. An education program undergoing accreditation is visited by peer assessors, who provide advice and evaluative feedback as well as assessing the program against a set of standards.

Objectives

The presentation will:

- Provide background and detail of an assessor training package
- Outline a process used to evaluate the effectiveness of the training
- Discuss enablers and barriers to the development of an effective peer review process for program accreditation.

Description

The training program includes detail of how to evaluate a program against expected standards as well as strategies to sensitively deal with the process of providing critical feedback.

Discussion

There are mixed views amongst education providers about the value of the peer review process, which may be perceived as helpful, but also may be perceived as interfering and irrelevant. The peer review process becomes very challenging where it is part of a formal accreditation process. Ensuring that the people who undertake a peer review process are well prepared, consistent, knowledgeable and able to provide feedback that is rigorous and helpful is important to the credibility of external accreditation.

Conclusion

Program accreditation by an external agency is a process that is used to assure students, the profession and the community that an education program is preparing graduates in line with expected standards. Developing the expertise of the assessors who undertake the peer review process is central to a high quality accreditation process.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy.

This paper provides detail of a training program developed for occupational therapists undertaking peer review as part of program accreditation in Australia. The training has potential for use in countries which rely on the peer review process to assure the quality of occupational therapy education programs.