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Near-misses and mistakes among new graduate occupational therapists in Australia and New Zealand

Michele Clark, Marion Gray, Merrolee Penman, Yvonne Thomas, Judith Trevan Hawke, Julie Smith, Joanna Bell

Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Introduction:

The examination of near-misses and mistakes that occur in occupational therapy has been a largely neglected research area. Most research regarding near-misses and mistakes comes from the fields of nursing and aviation.

Objectives:

This study explores the concepts of 'near-misses' and 'mistakes', specifically in relation to occupational therapy and patient safety. It then examines new graduate occupational therapists in Australia and New Zealand in relation to any near-misses and mistakes which they have experienced. This includes work settings as well as cultural and procedural arrangements for reporting or disclosing such events.

Methods:

All Australian and Aotearoa/New Zealand new graduate occupational therapists who completed studies in 2007 were eligible for inclusion in this research, undertaken in 2008. The sample comprised 178 Australian and 54 Aotearoa/New Zealand new graduates who completed an online survey tool developed for the study. The study was supported by the Council of Occupational Therapists Registrations Boards (Australia and New Zealand).

Results:

17.9% of Australian and 21.4% of Aotearoa/New Zealand new graduates experienced a near-miss. Data are also presented on the incidence of mistakes that placed a client/family at risk or placed self/colleague at risk. Over 10% of new graduates in both countries witnessed a mistake by another therapist which placed a client at risk. Whilst most respondents indicated that the workplace provided a supportive culture for disclosing near-misses and mistakes (89.5%; 97.6%), a surprising number of new graduates were unaware if their workplace had event reporting procedures (44.5%; 21.4%). Some differences between work settings were noted, with hand rehabilitation, aged care and acute care settings being more prone to such incidents.

Conclusion

The study provides cutting edge information about near-misses and mistakes in the occupational therapy workforce of two countries. Although mistakes and near-misses were not particularly common, a large number of new graduate therapists are not aware of event reporting procedures in their workplace.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy

This study provides practitioners, managers and professional bodies with evidence about the nature and incidence of near-misses and mistakes among new graduate therapists. Such information can inform quality improvement strategies.