

The development of international research centres should be a future trend to increase research into occupational practice

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Introduction

Commissioners of services use research to inform the commissioning process so a lack of research is a significant threat to the future of occupational therapy. Research prioritisation exercises consistently identify a lack of evidence to underpin occupational therapy practice. It has been suggested that a coordinated global response to developing the evidence for the effectiveness of occupational therapy is needed (Bannigan et al 2008).

Objective

To explore whether the development of international research centres should be a future trend in occupational therapy, using the example of research into occupation and mental health

Description

There is little research to help us understand the contribution of occupation to mental health and well being. Thus, researchers need to develop and lead co-ordinated programmes of research that focus on providing evidence for a causal relationship between occupation, mental health and well being (COT 2006). This presents considerable challenges as:

- the norm in occupational therapy has been to conduct one-off studies rather than programmes of research,
- so few people are engaged in research into occupation and mental health globally.

The Research Centre for Occupation and Mental Health was developed as a focus to bring people together to capitalise on strengths and not duplicate effort.

Discussion

Developing a centre in this way represents a shift in approach to research capacity building from working with individuals on a one to one basis to facilitating an international, inter-disciplinary research network. This approach is enabling us to not only to build a cadre of research-skilled people but to conduct the large scale studies that demonstrate the value of occupation to mental health and well being.

Conclusion

A coordinated global response to developing the evidence for the effectiveness of occupational therapy is needed and this can best be achieved by developing international research centres to increase research into occupational practice.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy

To provide a template for the development of global, occupationally focused research centres in a range of clinical areas.