

Exploring innovative program development integrating occupational therapy into a primary care team in underserved areas of the Dominican Republic.

April Andrescavage, Eric Kurzenberger

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA, United States

Since 2004, the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia has sent healthcare professionals to the Dominican Republic (DR) to provide medical services to poverty-stricken families for a two-week period twice a year. This mobile clinic is primarily comprised of physicians, residents, nurse practitioners, nurses and medical students who work alongside local doctors and nurses surrounding Consuelo, DR. In June of 2008, the first Occupational Therapist (OT) traveled accompanied the team to the DR to establish a therapy program in the Bateyes (local villages). Since that expedition OT has established themselves as integral partner in this primary care team.

The objective of this oral presentation is to illustrate the importance of developing innovative programs for OTs in their effort to provide services to underserved and impoverished areas of the world.

The inclusion of OT in the Bateyes of the DR is a continual process of collaboration, teamwork and learning. As a new venture, it was important to value communication and partnership with established health systems. It was imperative to build relationships by exploring the Dominican culture on the Bateyes through direct observation, interaction with families, and discussion with local professionals. Conducting needs assessments for OT services is constant and evolving requirement of program development.

Developmental and functional assessments of play and daily life are integral components to providing holistic care for the families on the Bateyes. The (AIMS) Assessment of Infant Motor Scales is currently being utilized to gather primary data focusing on development that can be used both in provision of care and parent education. It was initially determined that four main service areas could be provided; development and disability/functional screening, health promoter education, family education, and outreach to the local orphanage. Several therapeutic interventions that are utilized are wound and scar management, neuromuscular intervention, infant massage, equipment adaptations, and developmental stimulation.

Implications for the future of this program include developmental education for families and health professionals, determination of best practices to promote function for children with disabilities, and opportunities for research concerning OT in outreach programs for underserved communities.