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Health Inequalities: Evidence and Opportunities for Occupational Therapy and Population Health

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Introduction

National and international organizations establish goals and strategies for improving population health for all people and eliminating health inequalities. This presentation will review current evidence and resources relevant to occupational therapy and discuss opportunities for making contributions to goals of eliminating health inequalities.

Objectives

Participants will be able to discuss health inequalities and

- the determinants of health relevant to occupational therapy
- current evidence related to occupational therapy
- available data and resources.
- occupational therapy initiatives and research
- opportunities for occupational therapy to improve population health

Description

Elimination of health inequalities is a global priority and also included as part of many national health agendas. However, occupational therapy research and initiatives on health inequalities are limited even though many of the determinants of health and inequalities are areas of concern for occupational therapy. Many occupational therapists need further understanding of health inequalities, awareness of data and resources, knowledge of evidence on health inequalities relevant to occupational therapy, and information on opportunities for education, practice, and research on health inequalities.

Results

There is growing evidence on health inequalities and the determinants of health. International organizations identify specific measures of population health and collect data on populations to compare health levels. These data suggest occupational issues of concern in populations with health inequalities and an important role for occupational therapy. Many of the determinants of health are related to person-environment-occupation characteristics but require occupational therapists to adopt international health terminology and strategies. Expanded involvement of occupational therapy in population health would increase focus on the importance of occupations to health equality.

Conclusion

Increased understanding of international evidence and efforts to address health inequalities will help occupational therapists become involved in population health programs. Occupational therapists may use their frames of reference to make significant contributions toward elimination of health inequalities.

Contributions

Increased emphasis on health inequalities in education, research, practice, and professional associations will enable occupational therapy to broaden our scope of practice to population health,

contribute to research and evidence on the determinants of health, and collaborate with organizations who are working on health inequalities.