

Student and University Roles in Preparing Occupational Therapy Students for Practice: A Model for Work-Readiness

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Introduction: A wide range of professional competencies are required by rehabilitation students to meet the demands of complex healthcare environments. Despite acquiring clinical skills and knowledge for a particular career, some graduates struggle to successfully integrate into practice environments. Work-readiness (WR) has been defined in the literature as the extent to which graduates possess the following four attributes, which prepare them for success in the workplace: Personal Characteristics, Organizational Acumen, Work Competence and Social Intelligence.

Objective: To explore factors related to WR specific to occupational therapy (OT) as part of a larger investigation including speech-language pathology & physiotherapy.

Methods: Group and individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with clinicians, recent graduates, employers and regulators. 26 participants were interviewed, including 9 occupational therapists. Transcripts were analysed using descriptive content analysis. Codes were organised into themes and summarised into (1) discipline-specific WR frameworks and (2) over-arching rehabilitation WR framework.

Results: Four major themes emerged from the OT data regarding WR: OT identity (self-awareness, professional identity and confidence), Therapeutic Use of Self (TUS), Advocacy (for profession and clients) and Work Context (societal and systemic). Pre-existing WR attributes were 'mapped' into the resulting frameworks. Findings were used to examine the roles of students and university programs to develop WR, recommend curricula considerations, and create a WR educational module.

Conclusion: Results revealed the importance of professional identity formation and TUS skills needed to navigate diverse OT practice environments. The OT WR framework highlights important areas for entry-level education to position students for successful transition to practice.