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Practicing Occupational Justice: The Capabilities Approach

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Introduction: The debate on social justice is the largest tradition in political history. In recent years, along with other professionals, occupational therapists have demonstrated an interest in the social justice discussion. The concept of social justice is reflected in the term 'occupational justice' in the occupational therapy literature. An approach is needed to provide a meaningful and useful framework for occupational justice in occupational science and occupational therapy.

Objective: To review social justice debates in occupational therapy practice.

Approach: This paper describes Nussbaum's ten Central Human Functional Capabilities (CHFCs) with respect to occupational therapy practice. The CHFCs, as described by Nussbaum include: Life; Bodily Health; Bodily Integrity; Senses, Imagination, and Thought; Emotions; Practical Reason; Affiliation; Other Species; Play; and, Control over One's Environment. How these capabilities are consistent with professional values is emphasized.

Practical implications: Occupational therapists may use the CHFCs to guide assessment, intervention and outcome of occupational justice.

Conclusion: The CHFCs can be considered as a framework for understanding occupational justice. OTs have major roles in advocating for their clients' CHFCs, and enabling clients to achieve them.