

Occupation promotes health. Really?: How a shift in a fundamental principle in occupational therapy can support client-centred, occupational enablement

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Rationale: Occupational therapists commonly articulate that "occupation promotes health." By default, things that people do that are perceived by occupational therapists as unhealthy are categorized as behaviours, a term typically associated with negative connotations and outcomes. However, researchers are increasingly arguing for a change in the assumptions about what can be viewed as occupation. For instance, drug use and smoking are typically seen by therapists as negative behaviours with no positive qualities for the individual, while cooking and exercise are typically associated with purely positive occupational outcomes, such as increases in health and well-being. However, Elliot (2012) and Wasmuth and colleagues (2015) have challenged these ideas.

Objectives: This presentation will use findings from recent studies/literature about the meaning of people's doings to argue that an expanded understanding of the association of occupation and health is needed within occupational therapy to support effective client-centred, occupational enablement, especially for marginalized and/or vulnerable populations.

Approach: This presentation will outline the concepts of interest and present findings from studies on drug use, eating disorders, and smoking to initiate a discussion with the audience on the implications of a change in how we view the association between occupation and health.

Practice Implications: Occupational therapists need to challenge their assumptions that behaviours are always negative while occupations are always positive to support desired and "healthy" occupational change for their clients.

Conclusion: The specific meanings associated with what people do are contextually dependent and more complex than a simple division between good or bad, healthy or unhealthy.