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Use of patient related variables to predict occupational therapists time use in clinical settings

Bianca Summers[1,2], Kate Laver[1], Rebecca Nicks[2], Chris Barr[1], Natasha Lannin[2,3]
[1]*Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia,* [2]*Alfred Health, Melbourne, Australia,* [3]*La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia*

Introduction: Demand for health care continues to increase as populations grow, and services are expected to meet increasing clinical need within existing resources. Studies of time use in nursing and medical professionals have resulted in recommendations to improve efficiency and inform workforce planning. There are, however gaps in our understanding of variables influencing occupational therapists' time use.

Objective: To determine if patient-related variables can predict the time occupational therapists attribute to inpatients. This study also explores whether occupational therapist time-use differs between hospital sites and settings.

Method: Retrospective linkage of routinely collected data were conducted using a cohort of inpatients discharged from a major metropolitan hospital in Australia over a 12-month period. Inpatients were included if they were aged 18 or over and had received a Functional Autonomy Measurement System (SMAF) assessment. The relationship between patient age, marital status, primary language, SMAF score and occupational therapist clinical time use (hospital statistics) were investigated.

Results: Data sets from 5319 inpatients and three hospital sites were linked. Age and SMAF scores were found to be significantly correlated with occupational therapist time-use. Multiple regression analysis was completed with age and SMAF scores predicting 6.4% ($R^2=0.064$; $p<0.01$) of variance in occupational therapist time use. There was little variation in the time-use across the different study sites and settings.

Conclusion: Functional autonomy and age were predictive of occupational therapist clinical time use. Effect size, however was small and not sufficient to plan workforce needs at this time.