

OT Student Perceptions of the Use of Occupation-Based Interventions in Hand Therapy

Elaine Bauer, DrOT, Colleen Maher, OTD, OTR/L, CHT

University of the Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, USA

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Primary Author and Speaker: Elaine Bauer, ecbauer3@gmail.com

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study was to answer the following research question: what are occupational therapy students' knowledge and perceptions of the use of occupation-based interventions in hand therapy. The secondary aim of this study was to determine if there is a need for increased education in occupational therapy curricula regarding occupation-based intervention in hand therapy. There has been a growing trend in the literature regarding occupational therapists abandoning their occupation-based roots and utilizing more biomechanical approaches in hand therapy treatment (Burley et al., 2018; Daud et al., 2015; Grice, 2015). This study aimed at determining if this issue begins at the education level.

DESIGN: A mixed-methods survey research design was utilized. Subjects were recruited via a recruitment email containing the link to the survey. To be included, subjects were required to be enrolled in the professional/graduate phase of an Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) accredited master's or doctor of occupational therapy program in the state of Pennsylvania. Students were also required to be enrolled in either an entry-level or post-baccalaureate program. Those who were in the pre-professional/undergraduate phase or post professional programs were excluded. Utilizing convenience sampling, all students who completed the survey were included in the study.

METHOD: A survey containing both close-ended and open-ended questions was developed in Qualtrics XM. The survey was distributed to program directors/chairs of ACOTE accredited occupational therapy master's and doctoral programs in the state of Pennsylvania to then be forwarded to the students to complete. Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on quantitative data. A process of inductive and deductive coding was completed on qualitative data with subsequent thematic analysis.

RESULTS: A total of 27 occupational therapy students responded to the survey. Results show that occupational therapy students do not have a strong understanding of the use of occupation-based interventions in hand therapy, and there is a disconnect between their knowledge of occupations as they relate to hand therapy. Students perceived limited education about occupation-based interventions in hand therapy content in school and report predominantly biomechanical instruction (81.48%).

CONCLUSION: Findings of this pilot study suggest the confusion and disconnect between the use of occupation-based interventions in hand therapy begins at the education level. Occupational therapy curricula need to be adjusted to incorporate more occupation-based content into hand therapy education to ensure occupational therapists practicing in hand therapy do not lose touch with the core of the profession. To ensure that hand therapy remains within the scope of occupational therapy practice, it is imperative that changes are made to bring occupation back to the forefront, which begins with education.

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