

A phenomenological exploration of occupation-based practice and education: Occupational therapy graduates' perspectives

Amelia Di Tommaso^{1,2}, Alison Wicks², Stephen Isbel², Jennie Scarvell²

¹*Griffith University, Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia,* ²*University of Canberra Health Research Institute, Bruce, Australian Capital Territory, Australia*

Introduction: The unique contribution of occupational therapy within healthcare settings is the use of occupation to promote health and wellbeing. In recent decades, the focus on occupation in practice has reduced in favour of aligning practice to fit within impairment-focused systems. Research has shown that occupational therapists have difficulty demonstrating the theoretical perspectives of the profession in practice. However, occupation and its importance are taught in all World Federation of Occupational Therapists' accredited university programs. Challenges between educational requirements and the demands of contemporary practice have not been fully investigated from the perspectives of new and recent graduates.

Objectives: This paper aims to uncover the perceptions of Australian new and recent graduates about occupation-based practice and education.

Method: A phenomenological research design was used to uncover the perceptions of occupational therapy graduates about occupation in their practice and their experiences of learning about occupation-based practice. Semi-structured interviews were completed until data saturation was reached. Thematic analysis was used to inductively develop themes.

Results: Eighteen occupational therapists were interviewed. Therapists believed that whilst occupation was important but not central to occupational therapy and implementing this in practice was challenging and unrealistic in acute settings. University educational experiences contributed to the graduates feeling unable to implement occupation in practice.

Conclusion: New and recent graduates are graduating with a sense of confusion about occupation in occupational therapy and are choosing not to use occupation in practice. Knowledge uncovered in this study can inform future considerations for occupational therapy practice and education.