

Developing a Common Framework for Documenting Case Studies in Occupational Therapy

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Introduction: Evidence is needed to demonstrate the benefits of occupational therapy. Yet, whilst some randomised controlled trials are being conducted, large gaps in the occupational therapy knowledge base persist. A solution is to encourage occupational therapists to collect case studies which can then be pooled. To achieve this, a simple, standard protocol is needed that can capture the scope of therapy from highly manualised therapy to highly individual therapy, diverse theoretical approaches and different types of therapists whether scientists or reflective practitioners (Fishman 2001).

Objectives: This study aimed to create 'a common framework' for systematically documenting case studies in occupational therapy.

Method: A participatory design approach was employed involving over 150 occupational therapists as the end users. The process comprised a literature review, developing a prototype and refining the prototype through consensus conferences.

Results: A manual, and corresponding database, have been developed to guide occupational therapists through the process of systematically documenting the logic, process and outcome of their professional practice. The guidance is divided into four manageable steps:

- Step 1: Selecting a case to research and ethical considerations
 - Step 2: Documenting occupational therapy practice
 - Step 3: Writing occupational goals
 - Step 4: Measuring outcome(s) and using the GAS-Light
- The appendices include background materials. The manual and database are acceptable to occupational therapists.

Conclusion: Collecting case studies using this manual has the potential to increase research capacity, as well as research evidence, in occupational therapy. It now needs to be piloted to assess its feasibility in practice settings.