

Occupational Therapists' Pain Knowledge: A National Survey

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Introduction: Pain is a global phenomenon with significant ramifications on occupational performance across the lifespan. Occupational therapists (OTs) play a critical role in maximizing function and minimizing role competency loss through prevention, self-management and specialized treatment grounded in their unique theoretical construction of health through occupation. Although there has been a rapid increase in understanding pain, a delay in applying this knowledge to clinical practice is evident.

Objectives: This study surveyed Canadian OTs to identify whether their pain knowledge is current or if the gaps identified in past studies have remained the same. The findings will provide information to guide the development of targeted pain knowledge translation strategies for occupational therapists.

Methods: A self-report survey, including demographic questions and part of the City of Boston's Rehabilitation Professionals' Knowledge and Attitude Survey (COBS), was disseminated electronically to all members of the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists.

Results: A total of 354 therapists, mostly from Ontario, Alberta and Nova Scotia and working in the community, acute care and private practice, participated. Over 50% had 10 years or less of experience. Deficit knowledge areas were identified in pediatric pain, chronic versus acute pain, pain assessment and medications. These findings are consistent with deficits identified in pre-2000 studies.

This suggests the need for occupational therapy training programs and occupational therapy associations to provide education focusing on the identified pain knowledge gaps.

Conclusion: Pain knowledge gaps persist among Canadian OTs and this must be addressed within the occupational therapy curriculum and in professional development initiatives.