

The Occupational Therapy Role in Disaster Preparedness

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Introduction: Recommendations for interdisciplinary collaboration between American healthcare practitioners and key players in Disaster Management raise the question: What is the most effective way to educate Occupational Therapists about this subject? The results of this doctoral project represent an attempt to design a comprehensive, educational workshop to introduce American practitioners to their role in this practice area.

Objectives: Practitioners will identify common principles of Occupational Therapy and Disaster Management; discuss implications of data indicating gaps in service and education; review practical steps for practitioners to access free training at local, state and federal levels.

Method: A training curriculum (free educational workshop) and data collection tool were developed and implemented on three separate occasions, between 2015-2016 in two American states. Twenty-five OT practitioners completed post-survey questions regarding their attitude, perceived knowledge, and confidence in their mastery of key concepts and tools related to preparedness in their daily lives.

Results: Participants indicated high perceived value of key emergency planning tools for shelter-in-place and evacuation planning, and varying confidence in their ability to implement in realistic scenarios. The majority indicated that they favored disaster scenario-based group exercises as a method of educational delivery.

Conclusion: These findings offer foundational data upon which to refine future training efforts for practitioners interested in disaster preparedness. The data supports the need to develop basic competency standards in this practice area, as well as site-specific training needs.