

Strategy Application: Addressing the gap in occupational therapy assessment methods

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Occupational therapy focuses on enhancing occupational performance. Best practice guidelines recommend using standardised assessments. Performance assessments yield information about task performance but do not explain why performance is limited. Impairment assessments identify underlying problems with capacity but do not measure performance impact. Few are person centred, most contain pre-determined items that lack cross cultural relevance and most align with a psychometric paradigm that limits their use when impairment is complex. Occupational therapists require specific information about how people use their underlying capacities to meet the demands of daily life. A gap in assessment methods exists.

Objectives: To construct a model for assessing strategy application that could shape the development of future assessments.

Approach: The Occupational Performance Model (Australia)(OPMA) illustrates connections between performance, context, capacity and impairment. Assessments of strategy application examine the relationship between observed performance AND how well one is able to apply themselves to what has to happen. The ability to apply oneself entails using one's biomechanical, sensory-motor, cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal capacities by generating moving, sensing, thinking, feeling and communicating behaviours needed to meet the demands of what has to occur. Examples of strategy application assessment are The Perceive, Recall, Plan & Perform Assessment and the Upper Limb Performance Assessment.

Practice Implications: Assessments which yield information about how well people apply themselves to the tasks being performed gives therapists objective information about occupational performance. The impact of impairment on performance is no longer speculative.

Conclusions: Strategy application assessments fill the gap in assessment practice. More are needed.