

Professional reasoning of OT in China, 1986-2006: A historical documentary research

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Background: In 1996, a National Hospital Standard defined OT as an essential rehabilitation service in China but stipulated that OT should be established as one of many therapeutic approaches in rehabilitation therapy, i.e., not a health profession.

Objectives: To understand the development of professional reasoning of OT in China from 1986 to 2006.

Method: This is a historical documentary research covering 20 years before and after 1996. A search of all OT papers published from 1986 to 2006 in the Chinese Academic Journals database yielded 1,308 papers. Among them, 51 papers covered professional reasoning. Each was reviewed by 2 researchers. Thematic analysis was conducted using an interpretive approach.

Results: Two themes were identified: ongoing changes and sustaining contexts. Theme one consists of three changes: (1) from OT being an approach used by various healthcare providers to becoming a separate profession; (2) from simple and superficial (e.g., upper limb exercise) to in-depth and complex professional reasoning, (e.g., occupation-based models); and (3) from relying on overseas experience to building on local practice experience. Theme two covers three sustaining practice contexts: (1) insufficient supply of qualified OT, (2) misconceptions of the roles and functions of OT, and (3) scope confined to hospital-based rehabilitation for people with physical disability.

Conclusion: Early health policy has continued to influence current practice. Reflecting on the history has allowed us to appreciate the reasons why OT was needed in the past. How to establish professional reasoning most suitable for China in the present will be discussed.