Occupational Therapy and the training of Community Health Workers

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Make today matter
Overview

- Primary Health Care Re-engineering
- Community Health Workers
- Community Oriented Primary Care (COPC)
- The Capability Approach
- Occupational Therapy
Primary Health Care Re-engineering

- Primary Health Care (PHC) re-engineering in South Africa
  - National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 Vision

- PHC teams to improve people’s health and well-being
  - Goal 7: Primary healthcare teams provide care to families and communities
    - “Each household must have access to a well-trained community health worker”

- PHC teams = Ward-based outreach teams (WBOTs)

- Around 10 community health workers (CHWs) under leadership of professional nurse
Community Oriented Primary Care

- Community Oriented Primary Care (COPC) is
  - primary care
  - where health- and other professionals
  - work with people and organisations
  - in defined communities
  - to identify and respond to health and health-related needs
  - in order to improve health

Marcus TS, 2013
Community Health Workers

- CHWs deliver integrated primary care in defined areas

Roles include:
- household registration
- individual health status assessments
- health promotion and education
- disease prevention and management in households
- psycho-social support
- referral

- various training programmes exist
Capability Approach

Amartya Sen

- human beings are defined by ‘functionings’
- made up of ‘beings’ and ‘doings’ i.e. what you are and what you do
- functionings are what people value and have reason to value e.g. being nourished, literate and employed
- ‘capabilities’ are the opportunities to achieve and enjoy those beings and doings
- using the opportunities that exist for being and doing, or the ability to pursue and realise goals that are valued, is ‘agency’
- the interplay of functionings, capabilities and agency determines wellbeing
- when this interplay is optimal, there is freedom

Robeyns I, 2016
Deneulin S, Shahani L, 2009
Occupational Therapy

- Occupational Therapy (OT) aims to achieve health, well-being and participation in life through engagement in occupation.
- "Doing' or 'not doing' are powerful determinants of wellbeing or disease." Wilcock A, 1999
- The training of CHWs should be concerned with building human capabilities through \textit{investment in people}, and using those human capabilities optimally through an \textit{enabling framework} for growth and employment
- Occupational therapists (OTs) can thus contribute meaningfully to training CHWs.
CHW education

- Freire’s concept of **critical consciousness** is key to guide those who are involved in CHW training/education.
  - *who* is teaching,
  - *who* is *being taught*, and
  - *how* they are being taught matter as much as
  - *what* is being taught
- It is through engagement in dialogue that critical thinking and hope can emerge

*Walker M, 2009*
Conclusion

- OT philosophy, theory and approaches are very relevant within community-oriented primary care
- OTs can and should contribute significantly
- Especially in the context of poverty and limited resources

- Using the capability approach in educating CHWs is liberating and helps us to value who they are, what they do, and what they and the community members they work with can become.
Thank You

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