

Exploring Occupational Therapy Advocacy

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BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

Occupational therapy (OT) has been the only healthcare profession demonstrated to reduce hospital lengths of stay and readmissions, thus saving healthcare dollars (Brouwer, Eisenberg, Hillison, & Van Wyk, 2018; Roberts & Robinson, 2014; Rogers, Bai, Lavin, & Anderson, 2017).

Despite this proven effectiveness, there is limited understanding of OT amongst both the general population and amongst healthcare professionals.

Advocacy is considered a professional role of occupational therapists (Dhillon, Wilkins, Law, Stewart, & Tremblay, 2010; Kirsh, 2015).

Developing a sense of confidence regarding professional roles increases the odds of advocating for the profession and preventing clinician burnout (Ashby, Adler, & Herbert, 2016).

Therefore, the purpose of this capstone project was to promote knowledge of the profession of OT.

METHODS

Grant Application

- Applied to Society for the Study of Occupation: USA grant

Interprofessional Education (IPE)

- Facilitated an IPE event with OT, medical, nursing, and pharmacy students
- Created a poster regarding OT's role in IPE
- Contributed to IPE-related manuscript

Advocate Role

- Represented OT at a variety of undergraduate classes, seminars, and panels
- Created content and resources for University of South Dakota OT Department (Figure 1)
- Submitted an abstract to the 2020 OT Education Summit

Educator Role

- Facilitated advocacy-related assignments for second-year OT students
- Facilitated a lecture and lab for physical therapy students regarding basics of OT

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Occupational Behavior (OB) (Reilly, 1969)

Within this OT theoretical model, health and well-being occur when one is able to follow an intrinsic desire to engage in purposeful occupation. Due to its grounding in occupation as both a means and an end in OT, it was utilized to promote the unique, positive contributions that result from the profession's broad and holistic scope of practice.

Andragogy (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2015)

This adult learning theory emphasizes the unique needs and contexts of adult learners, including the importance of considering the relevance of learning material to the learner's life and self-directed learning. This theory was the foundation for the IPE event, community presentations and the development of resources promoting OT, and during facilitation and grading of the second-year OT student advocacy assignments.

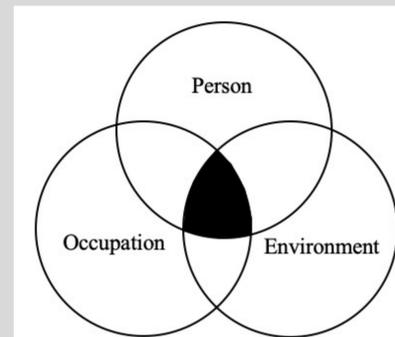
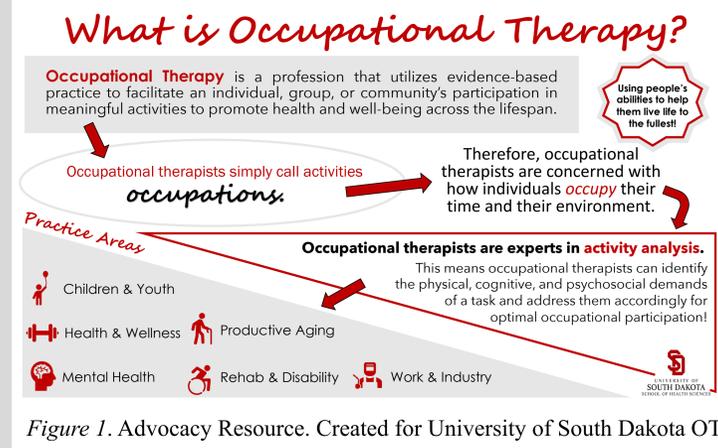


Figure 2. The PEO model (Law et al., 1996).

IMPLICATIONS FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Revision of Theory

Given the breadth of the OB and andragogy, use of Ikiugu's Eclectic Method would have been appropriate to designate OB as the organizing model of practice and andragogy as a complementary models of practice. The Person-Environment-Occupation (PEO) model would have been beneficial to include as a second complementary model of practice (Ikiugu & Smallfield, 2011; Law et al., 1996).

The PEO model includes a visual diagram that was useful for communicating the basics of OT during advocacy opportunities (Figure 2). This model also aligns well with the American OT Association's (2014) explanation of OT purpose and scope of practice.

Recommend updating OB to include concepts from occupational science and to expand the work-play continuum. A visual model of OB would be beneficial for communicating the value of occupations.

Implications for OT Education, Research, & Practice

If more capstone students incorporate advocacy components into their capstone experiences, it may help to bridge the current OT knowledge gap outside of the profession. Furthermore, OT students that become comfortable embracing an OT advocate role are more likely to become OT practitioners that inherently fulfill an advocate role. This may ultimately lead to an increase in the number of patients for whom occupational therapists can make a functional and pragmatic difference.

Occupational therapy educators have made positive contributions to the literature regarding effective IPE experiences. These educators have the opportunity to fulfill an interprofessional responsibility to further contribute to this evidence-base, as there are many roles for OT within IPE.

RESULTS / CONCLUSIONS

- The IPE ICU simulation event was effective in increasing interprofessional awareness and understanding of OT as well as contributing to professional development for most OT student participants, as all participants correctly identified the purpose of OT on the event posttest questionnaire.
- Utilizing andragogy was an effective method to engage and empower students to embrace an advocate role per anecdotal feedback.
- A variety of individuals were exposed to occupational therapy purpose and scope of practice through this capstone project, including professional healthcare students, undergraduate students, and community members.
- Capstone projects that incorporate advocational components are effective in increasing knowledge of OT outside of the profession.

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