

POSITION STATEMENT

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN WORK-RELATED PRACTICE

Introductory statement of purpose of paper

The purpose of this position statement is to

- Outline the position of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists on work-related practice including occupational health and safety (OH&S);
- Describe the benefits of work to health and wellbeing of individuals and groups; and
- Articulate the role of occupational therapy in the provision of work-related services.

The term work-related practice refers to the provision of occupational therapy services that promote injury prevention and health promotion in the workplace or enable an individual affected by injury, illness or disability to return to work or to secure and maintain meaningful and productive employment. Where possible, or as soon as possible following injury or illness, occupational therapy services are provided at the workplace, in close consultation with employers and supervisors.

Statement of the position being taken

The role for occupational therapists in work-related practice reflects the fundamental principles and models that have been seminal to practice by the profession since its inception (Kielhofner & Burke, 1983). Occupational therapy skills are recognised as effective in work-related practice by important stakeholders in the field including, employers, other health care providers, insurers and lawyers. These skills are based on knowledge of human function and performance.

Occupational therapy services in work-related practice are dependent upon the needs and goals of the client, employer and/or insurers, and the environment in which the work activities occur. Work-related services include:

- Evaluation/assessment of the worker, the workplace and the tasks performed to enable and enhance productivity and to reduce the risk of injury or re-injury.
- Provision of advice to employers and insurers on workplace modification, access and assistive devices to enhance productivity and to reduce the risk of injury or re-injury.
- Case management and counselling of clients; effective collaboration with all stakeholders to establish and achieve common work goals.
- Workplace based assessment and training to promote safer work practices to reduce the risk of injury.
- Health promotion programs to foster a culture of healthy work and workplaces.
- Targeted intervention programs such as skill building, vocational training, work hardening and relevant workplace modification for clients who have either not previously worked, or have an impairment that changes their work needs, and for clients who are entering, re-entering and or remaining at work

Statement of the significance of the position to occupational therapy

This position statement reinforces the view that the basic function of occupational therapy is the restoration of health through activity (Holmes, 1985). Occupational therapists have expertise in work-related practice and occupational health and safety because:

- Occupation is central to the profession's frame of reference (Yerxa, 1998). Occupational therapists consider the person's physical, behavioural, cognitive, social and emotional capacity in relation to work-related activities as part of environments and contexts.

- Task analysis is a core skill of the profession and allows the identification of barriers and enablers to work. Consequently occupational therapists are able to determine the necessary interventions to enhance the job-person fit.
- Occupational therapists operate in a client centred manner and can adapt the work environment with other stakeholders to work towards the identified outcome. This requires knowledge and skill in the area of psychosocial assessment and interventions; physical assessment of function, knowledge of injury and illness and their impact on the function of the individual or populations.
- Occupational therapists understand the often complex regulatory environments specific to different jurisdictions within countries and work effectively with a variety of stakeholders with competing needs (Adam et al., 2013).

Statement of the significance of the position to society when appropriate

The World Federation of Occupational Therapists affirms the rights of people, regardless of their ability, to participate in productive occupations such as work and affirms that occupational therapists have the expertise in the work-related practice including occupational health and safety to enable their participation.

This position statement supports and compliments the World Federation of Occupational Therapists' position statement on vocational rehabilitation and supports the long term position of the International Labour Organisation in promoting 'Decent Work' for people with disabilities.

Substantiating rationale for the position

The support of the individual or group to identify and work to achieve maximum desired function is the focus of any occupational Therapy intervention. Injury risk management and prevention, injury treatment and management, and wellness promotion activities can support these interventions.

Challenges and strategies

- Dissemination of unique contributions of occupational therapists from the perspective of healthy workplace and healthy workers
- Education to employers, other healthcare providers, insurers and lawyers about the scope of practice of occupational therapists in work-related practice
- Research needs to provide evidence of the effectiveness of occupational therapy intervention in work-related practice.
- National associations need to advocate and lobby for occupational therapists to work in this area of practice.

Conclusion

All people have a right to participate in productive work. The provision of work-related acute and rehabilitation services can enable adults to enter, re-enter, return to and remain at work. Occupational therapists have the expertise in the provision of work-related and occupational health services.

References

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