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An Occupation-based Approach to Chronic Pain in Rural Alaska

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Abstract

Background

Adults with chronic pain living in rural communities experience occupational deprivation due to a lack of access to healthcare resources and tend to report higher levels of pain compared to urban areas [4, 8]. Chronic pain is multifaceted and managed by many professionals. Occupational therapy (OT) has a significant role in offering effective strategies to improve quality of life, self-efficacy, and daily functioning for those who experience chronic pain [5, 7].

Purpose

The purpose of this scholarly project was to advocate for the profession of occupational therapy within rural Alaska areas as well as develop an evidence-based, model-driven, culturally relevant resource guide for OT practitioners. The guide entitled *Occupational Therapy Guide to Interprofessional Chronic Pain Management in Rural Alaska*, provides occupation-based interventions for chronic pain management with clients in rural communities and will improve interprofessional collaboration in a culturally relevant manner that supports the functional abilities in people who have chronic pain.

Methodology

Databases such as PubMed, CINAHL, SAGE, EBSCO Host, Google Scholar, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Journal of Occupational Therapy (AJOT), and the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) were used to complete a thorough literature review.

Conclusion

The *guide* was created to fill a gap in the healthcare field for adults who experience chronic pain in rural Alaska communities. The projected outcome of the product is an increased presence of OT in rural Alaska, greater interprofessional collaboration, and an increase in occupational engagement and quality of life for adults experiencing chronic pain.

Literature Review

- Adults with chronic pain living in rural communities experience occupational deprivation due to lack of access to healthcare resources and tend to report higher levels of pain compared to urban areas [4, 8].
- Chronic pain limits engagement in multiple occupations such as: **sleep, self-care, work, and leisure tasks** [1, 6, 7].
- The complexity of the pain experience makes it difficult to measure and calls for a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach [3, 7].
- The role of OT with chronic pain management is most reflected in the evidence-based program entitled, *Lifestyle Redesign®*, which emphasizes use of meaningful activities when managing chronic pain to improve quality of life, self-efficacy, and functional abilities [7].

Statement of Need

- People with chronic pain in rural areas experience occupational deprivation.
- OT practitioners need to be included on interprofessional chronic pain management teams.

Purpose of scholarly project:

- Advocate for OT in rural Alaska
- Develop a resource guide orienting OT practitioners who are new to Alaska and working with adults experiencing chronic pain.

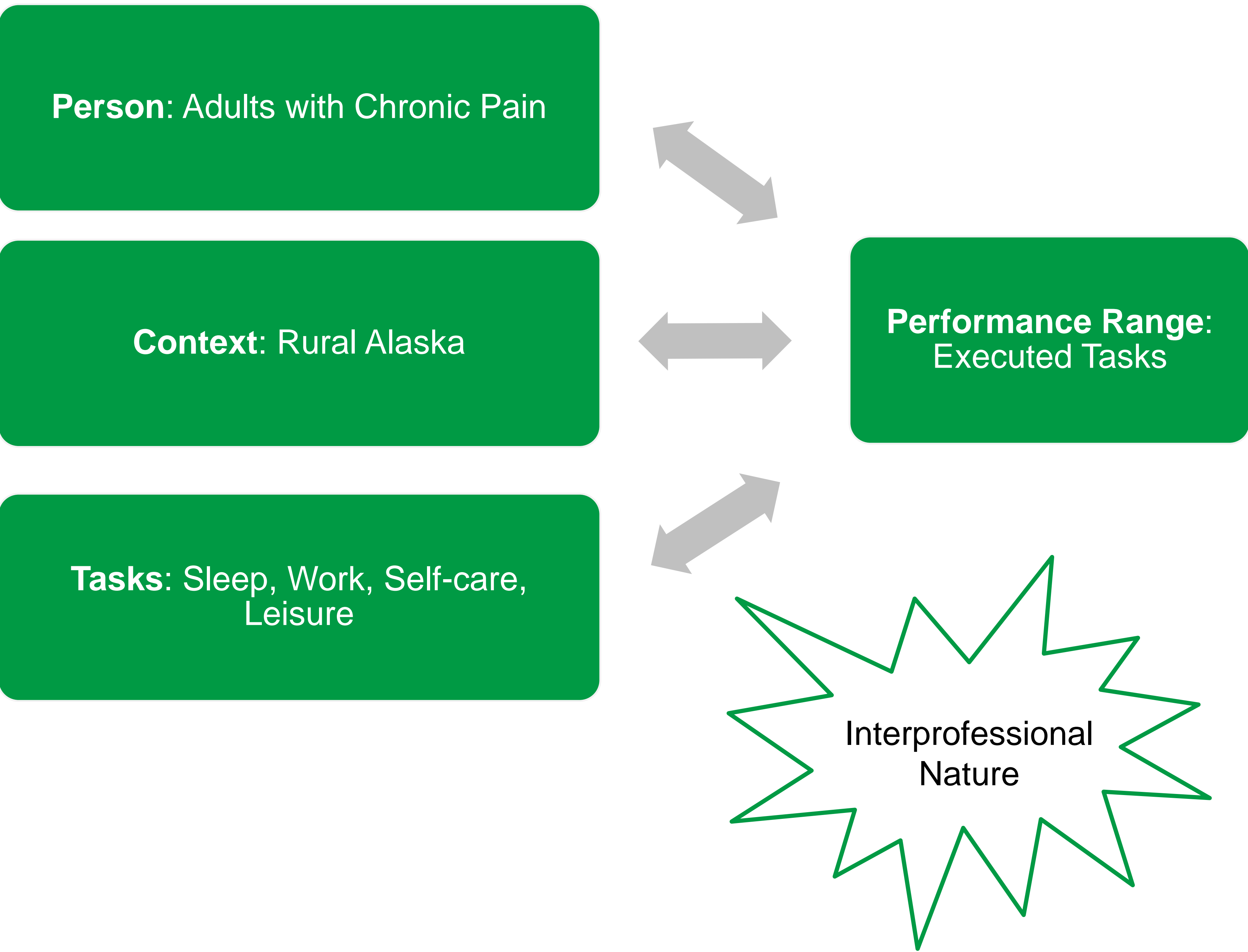
Product

The *Occupational Therapy Guide to Interprofessional Chronic Pain Management in Rural Alaska* was developed following a thorough literature review and self-immersion in Alaska culture. The contents of the guide were compiled into a spiral bound booklet and separated into four sections:

- Section I: Interprofessional Approach to Chronic Pain
- Section II: Evaluation for Chronic Pain
- Section III: Culturally Appropriate Chronic Pain Management in Rural Alaska
- Section IV: Occupation-based, Client-centered Intervention for Chronic Pain

The ecology of human performance (EHP) model guided the creation of this project [2]. Figure 1 highlights the four main components of EHP; person, context, task, and performance range and how they were used in the development of this scholarly project [2]. The intervention approaches; establish/restore, adapt/modify, alter, prevent, and create were used as a foundation for the development of intervention handouts [2].

Figure 1: EHP Concepts



Limitations & Recommendations

- Location of scholarly project may not accurately represent the majority population.
- No guidance from other occupational therapists.
- Outcomes have not yet been studied. Recommend further research through process of IRB approval to expand on the gaps and healthcare needs of rural Alaskan areas.

Contribution to Practice

- Evidence-and-occupation-based, model-driven, culturally relevant resource created for OT practitioners working with adults who experience chronic pain in rural Alaska.
- Positive advocacy efforts for the profession of occupational therapy.
- Effective interprofessional networking.
- Product could be used with travel agencies to orientate OT practitioners to interprofessional chronic pain teams in rural areas of Alaska.
- A new OT job position created and filled at an outpatient physical therapy clinic in rural Alaska!**

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