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Using Meaningful Leisure Activities in OT to Decrease Occupational Deprivation in Older Adults

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**This resource was written by doctoral-level students in fulfillment of the requirements of the Occupational Therapy course “OT 403 - Clinical Research Methods in Occupational Therapy” at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences, under the advisement of Professor/Course Director Anne Haskins, Ph.D., OTR/L, Assistant Professor Breann Lamborn, EdD, MPA, Professor Emeritus Gail Bass Ph.D., OTR/L, and Research and Education Librarian Devon Olson Lambert, MLIS.

Focused Question:



What is the evidence for the effect of eliminating occupational deprivation in older adults aged 65 years and older in skilled nursing facilities (SNF) through the use of meaningful leisure activities as an occupational therapy (OT) intervention?

Case Scenario:

The focus population for this critically appraised topic (CAT) was older adults aged 65 years and older who lived in an urban setting in SNFs. For the purpose of this CAT, an urban setting is defined as an area with 50,000 or more people residing (US Census, 2010). According to Lui (2018) who synthesized available data on productive aging for senior citizens in a SNF, stated that the global generation of older adults is currently more populous than ever recorded in world history. The extent of this demographic is expected to dramatically increase as a result of continued advances in medicine for aging and chronically ill populations. In a systematic review on social participation of community-dwelling older adults by Smallfield (2018), the United States' population of older adults is predicted to reach 84 million within the next 30 years. Generally speaking, present day SNFs nation-wide showed a lack of client-centered occupations that have beneficial aspects of productive aging such as an increased knowledge on leisure education (Liu, 2018). Rafeedi, Metzler, & Lamb (2018) literature review on the cultural environment in SNFs says that routines in SNFs are predictable and leave residents lacking meaning in their lives. He also explains how this leads to higher rates in depression and loneliness among residents which are often targeted with offering cliché games and activities in SNF that show little evidence of effectiveness (Rafeedi et al., 2018).

According to a critical interpretive synthesis on meaningful engagement for SNF residents by Du Toit et al. (2019b), older adults who received OT services in SNFs were at a greater risk of occupational deprivation due to lack of engagement in meaningful activities within their environments. The data from this study also showed that older adults with dementia who lived in residential-care facilities received OT interventions that neglected their occupational histories and personal interests. This, in turn, led to occupational deprivation among residents (Du Toit et al., 2019b). Older adults who experienced a lack of meaningful activity in their lives were at risk of both physical and mental health decline (Clarke et al., 2018). The lack of meaningful occupations in the lives of older adults was also an issue of social alienation and occupational injustice (Du Toit et al., 2019a).

As found in a randomized control trial by Rostrami, Akbarfahimi, Mehraban, Akbarinia, and Samani (2017), in the past, older adult populations who received OT lacked occupation-based interventions and were over prescribed rote exercises such as therapy bands and hand bikes. Rostami et al. (2017) found that using occupation-based interventions helped to improve a person's perception of performance, the ability to perform in activities of daily living (ADLs), and motivation when compared to those that had rote exercise based interventions. This article helped illustrate how the use of occupation-based therapy aided in positive client outcomes. According to American Occupational Therapy Association (2014), ADLs include activities such as dressing, feeding, and other personal hygiene tasks and instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs) include activities such as caring for others, home management, meal preparation, and safety and emergency maintenance.

Analyzing the problem of eliminating occupational deprivation in older adults who live in SNFs using the means of meaningful leisure activities during the OT intervention through the Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement (CMOP-E) lens is helpful in



understanding the enablement problems that arise with the lack of occupation-based interventions. The CMOP-E views the person as the primary construct by looking at his or her spirituality and both the physical and cognitive dimensions of his or her affect (Turpin & Iwama, 2011). The main occupational abilities addressed are in the areas of productivity, self-care and leisure activities (Turpin, & Iwama 2011). The environmental factors of the CMOP-E include: institutional, physical, cultural, and social (Turpin & Iwama, 2011). Common strategies with CMOP-E include adapt, advocate, coach, collaborate, coordinate, design/build and educate (Turpin & Iwama 2011).

Purpose Statement:

The purpose for this critically acclaimed topic is to delve into research that supports the use of meaningful activities such as social or leisure participation as a medium of occupational intervention for older adults in SNFs. OT interventions will be addressed through the lens of the CMOP-E to analyze how using meaningful leisure activities during occupational therapy will help to decrease occupational deprivation.

Search Strategy Methodology:

For the purpose of this CAT, the search databases that were used to find relevant articles included CINAHL and PubMed. CINAHL is an online database that has journals that relate to allied health and healthcare. PubMed is an online database with journal articles that relate to biomedical and life sciences. Both of these databases are focused on the broad field of medicine, and although they include articles relative to OT, they are not OT specific databases. Articles were searched using Boolean phrases with various combinations of the following key terms and topics: *leisure activities, older adults, social participation, community dwelling, skilled nursing facilities, occupational therapy, occupational therapy intervention, occupational based intervention, rote exercise and urban environment.*

Inclusion criteria for articles in this CAT were research articles on studies with participants aged 65 years and older and who lived in community dwelling settings such as SNFs. Exceptions were made for articles that included adults aged 65 years and older transitioning out of acute hospital care and those who were community dwelling and received OT care. Exclusion criteria for this CAT included research articles with the following participant characteristics: participants younger than 65 years of age, participants who were in acute long-term hospital care settings, and participants who had severe degenerative chronic illness such as late-term Parkinson or Alzheimer disease. Articles published later than 2015 (with the exceptions of a 1995 primary article on rote exercise overuse by Zimmerer-Branum & Nelson and an article by Berger et al. from 2013), case studies, and opinion pieces were also excluded. Articles that showed evidence for observation bias within their studies were excluded. In the four qualitative, NA articles included, author bias from the perspective of an occupational therapist was taken into consideration and accepted for use in this CAT.

Articles Included / Summary of Findings

This CAT included 10 articles. Of the 10 articles, three articles were Level I (Berger et al., 2013; Du Toit et al., 2019b; Smallfield, 2018), two articles were Level II (Kao, 2017, ; Zimmerer-Branum, 1995), one article was Level III (Whitson, 2013), and four articles were



Level NA (Clarke et al., 2018; Eschenfelder, 2005; Liu, 2018; Rafeedi et al., 2018). All articles in this CAT related to older adults who received OT intervention in either a SNF or in their urban community. These articles addressed social and leisure participation as a means of OT intervention to promote overall well being. The three most significant areas of importance that we discovered from these articles included: occupational deprivation, the importance of client-centered intervention, and the environment of SNFs.

Occupational Deprivation

Without the implementation of meaningful, client-centered, occupation-based practice that encompasses all 8 areas of occupation may cause injustices such as occupational deprivation may occur for the client. The 8 areas of occupation include ADLs, IADLs, sleep and rest, leisure, education, social participation, work and play (AOTA, 2014). Occupational deprivation is when a person is deprived or not granted the opportunity to engage in activities that are meaningful or necessary for their overall wellbeing (Whiteford, 2010). According to an article by Rafeedi, et al.(2018), OT interventions for older adults often focus primarily on occupational performance in ADLs and IADLs. This not only limits the opportunity of choice for the client but also disregards meaningful occupational areas like social and leisure activities. According to a study by Clarke et al. (2018), If older adults are not given opportunity for meaningful occupational engagement they may be at a greater risk for physical and mental decline. The inability to do these occupations can lead to physical and mental comorbidities such as the person becoming more frail (Rafeedi, Metzler, & Lamb, 2018) or experiencing depression (Berger et al., 2013) from lack of social engagement. Older adults with dementia may also face faster mental decline as a result of occupational deprivation (Du Toit et al., 2019a).

Importance of client-centered intervention

As Liu (2018) quoted, “Promoting functional ability is imperative to help older adults continue to enjoy doing what they value” (p. 3). There are still significant improvements that the field of OT needs to make in order to achieve its goal of promoting participation in all areas of occupation (Du Toit et al., 2019a). Of these improvements are OT interventions based on social and leisure participation, which are meaningful and valuable activities for older adults. According to Du Toit et al. (2019b), occupational therapists can help enable older adults to achieve occupational wellness through participation in leisure and social occupations. Meaningful occupation-based interventions may also enable greater motivation for clients. Zimmerer-Branum and Nelson (1995) found that the majority of those who are living in a SNF (17 out of 23 participants in the study) chose occupation-based activities over rote strengthening exercises. On average, those participants who used an occupation-based exercise did an average of 21 reps compared to the average 9 reps for the rote based exercises (Zimmerer-Branum & Nelson, 1995).

Environment of skilled nursing facilities

Currently, several aspects of the environment in SNFs are not supportive for the overall occupational well being of older adults. Rafeedi et al. (2018) says that the cultural environment in SNFs is routine, predictable, and leaves residents with meaningless activities and games (Rafeedi et al., 2018). Research shows that some SNF do not use nearly enough OT interventions



that focus on social participation (Berger et al., 2013). This practice is not supportive of the social environment of older adults who may experience loneliness as a result of social isolation from peers and loved ones (Smallfield, 2018). The cultural environment of SNFs can be impacted in a positive manner by their OT staff if practitioners hold the principles of the field to a high integrity (Rafeedi et al., 2018). Raffedi et al. (2018) stated that these principles included client-centered care and the promotion of individual choice. Rafeedi et al. (2018) also questioned if the pressures put on occupational therapists by insurance industries negatively impacts their performance for older adults in SNFs. As a result, this may have a harmful impact on the overall institutional environment for older adults in SNFs. According to an article by Du Toit et al. (2019b), the cultural environment in SNFs could be improved with continued rapport building between occupational therapists and their clients. This would affect the ability for occupational therapists to create interventions that are centered around client interests and occupational history. SNFs were also found to have predictable routines, lack of privacy, and lack of autonomy for their residents which could also impact the cultural environment for residents (Rafeedi et al., 2018).

Summary of Key Findings

Occupational therapists who work with older adults in SNFs traditionally spend the majority of their time on IADL and ADL interventions. In turn, this affects the ability for occupational therapists to offer true client-centered care because it excludes occupational performance in meaningful areas such as social and leisure participation. Physical and social participation make up 25% of the occupational areas in the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework and include many meaningful occupations for older adults (AOTA, 2014). Excluding these areas from OT intervention may result in occupational deprivation for the client (Du Toit et al., 2019b). For this reason, there are still improvements that the field of OT needs to make in order to embrace meaningful client-centered care. These improvements can be accomplished through the implementation of client-centered OT interventions such as social and leisure engagement that add meaning to SNF residents' lives.

In the end, the use of meaningful leisure activities as an OT intervention for older adults in SNFs showed increased motivation (Zimmerer-Branum, 1995) and decreased physical (Rafeedi et al., 2018) and mental health challenges (Du Toit et al., 2019a). Embracing social and leisure activities for older adults also creates a more enabling environment. Through enabling clients with opportunity in all aspects of occupational performance, older adults are allotted more autonomy and a higher quality of life. As an effect, older adults in SNFs are at a lower risk of experiencing occupational deprivation.

Clinical Bottom Line

From the limited research analyzed, there is strong evidence that implementing meaningful occupations such as social and leisure participation into OT intervention for older adults in SNFs will have positive outcomes. These outcomes included lowered occupational deprivation, increased motivation, and more enabling environments. Although the research in this area was positive, the extent was limited. To increase the validity of social and leisure activities as a means of OT intervention, further research should be explored.



Resources

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