

Life History of Teresa Dahlstrom, OTR/L

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Introduction

- The purpose of the project is to gather information about the history and evolution of occupational therapy (OT) practice in North Dakota and Wyoming through life histories of individuals who have been influential in developing OT in these two states. It is anticipated that the life history process will be a powerful way to gather this information. This study is intended to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists a view of history and how occupational therapy practice has evolved from its inception to current practice in North Dakota. We had the opportunity to interview Teresa Dahlstrom, who is an OT currently practicing in the Grand Forks Public Schools.

Literature Review

- Life history is used to portray a chronological development on someone's life. It includes all methods that develop a proper understanding of the participant's life (Frank, 1995).
- In 1984 the Health Insurance Association of America issues a statement on the description of occupational therapy, which is "a professional health care service which, when properly used, can be instrumental in decreasing hospital confinement, disability, and the ultimate cost of health care (Reed & Peters, 2006)."
- In 1983 the North Dakota State Board of Occupational Therapy practice provided licensure of OTR's and OTA's (State Board of Occupational Therapy Practice, 2017).



Methodology

- We did a qualitative study using a life history approach.
- Participant was assigned from a list developed by the course instructors through purposive sampling.
- There were no specific gatekeeper issues- initial contact was made by course instructors.
- Informed consent was given.
- The semi-structured interview was guided by an interview schedule prepared by the source instructors; the questions on the interview schedule were designed to be used with all the individuals interviewed as part of the larger project. The researchers were allowed to modify or add interview questions as needed for specific interview.
- Data was collected by doing a verbatim transcription of the interview. The researchers then analyzed content from the transcription to make codes, categories, themes, and an assertion.
- The interview took place within the UND Medical School, and it lasted about one hour.

Description of Participant

- Teresa Dahlstrom graduated with her Bachelors degree in occupational therapy from the University of North Dakota in May of 1984.
- She has had a variety of work experience, including the areas of neonatal intensive care, physical dysfunction, inpatient psychiatric, pediatric rehabilitation setting, and private practice where she served adult group homes, adult sheltered workshops, and adult developmental day programs.
- She is currently working at Grand Forks Public Schools, which serves 21 schools, and she has been working there for 23 years.
- Within the school setting, she has worked with children ages 3-21.
- She has held a variety of positions within the North Dakota Occupational Therapy Association, including president, vice president, Red River district chair, secretary, treasurer, state representative to AOTA, and Conference Committee Chair.
- She has served on the North Dakota Occupational Therapy Licensure Board as the Chairperson and as a professional OT member
- Her daily routine currently consists of providing skilled OT to 8-10 clients per day in the school setting. They work on a variety of skills including managing behaviors, improving school performance, and improving motor skills related to school function.
- She is married and has 3 children, one of which is an occupational therapist at Little Miracles in Grand Forks.

Data Analysis and Findings

- Data analysis was guided by the Kawa Model, which looks at turning points in life. The model is designed to ensure that occupational therapists work in a culturally sensitive, holistic way (Leadley, 2015).
- Integrity**
 - Dedicated to staying true to the OT Core Values.
 - Staying current with every changing trends and research within practice.
 - The quality of work as a therapist is a personal choice, and it is up to the individual to determine how they are going to use their time to serve others.
 - In order to stay true to the profession, our work should be dedicated to the clients we are helping, rather than being solely driven by reimbursement.
- Changes in OT**
 - There has been many shifts in OT throughout the duration of Teresa's practice.
 - Some of these changes include changes in children's behavior, family dynamics, and technology.
 - There has been changes regarding the level of education required to become an occupational therapist.
 - The profession of OT has adapted by becoming more diverse in their areas of practice, as well as becoming more essential to healthcare.
- Personal relationships**
 - Having relationships with clients is one of the most crucial aspects of the therapy process.
 - It is vital to create work life balance, in which Teresa has developed over time.
 - Teresa reported that her relationships outside of work are her sources of social support, and that being an OT has made her a better wife, mother, and friend.



Conclusions

- As OT is continually changing, Teresa has been dedicated to staying true to the OT core values by maintaining the integrity of the profession through upholding meaningful relationships with clients, staying current with trends and research, holding leadership roles, and establishing work life balance by developing social supports outside of work.
- Teresa's passion for OT was evident through her responses to questions, body language, and tone of voice. She believes that OT is an amazing profession, and she has never regretted her decision of becoming an OT.
- Teresa has been a leader within the state of North Dakota through her work holding positions and being a member of the North Dakota Occupational Therapy Association, advocating for the profession, and the impact she has made on each client she has worked with.

Acknowledgments

- Special thanks to Teresa Dahlstrom for her willingness to participate in this project. Her participation is valuable, as it is a piece of the development of OT within the state of North Dakota.

References

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