

Clients-centred occupational therapy in rehabilitation: Do we practice what we preach?

Gudrun Palmadottir

University of Akureyri, Akureyri, Iceland

Introduction: The occupational therapy profession claims to be strongly committed to client-centred practice. While a considerable effort has been put into definition and conceptual analysis of the phenomena, not much has been done to explore how client-centred practice is carried out in the daily work of occupational therapists. **Objectives:** The purpose of this study was to explore if and how theoretical descriptions of client-centredness were reflected in occupational therapy practice. **Method:** Using a qualitative approach, twenty clients were interviewed about their experiences of occupational therapy received at rehabilitation institutions. A template approach was applied to analyze how theoretical concepts derived from the literature were reflected in the informants' narratives. **Results:** Ten categories emerged under the three main headings of a) occupational therapist's attitudes and actions, b) therapist-client relationship, and c) philosophy and environment of occupational therapy service. Generally, the informants were satisfied with the service provided by occupational therapists and described them as respectful and supportive professionals, trying to meet their clients' needs. However, information about the possibilities involved in occupational therapy was sometimes limited as well as application of intervention strategies to personal situations. Power was clearly distributed by the therapist and in some instances did the client not have much influence on the therapy process and goals were unclear. Institutional philosophy and rules together with occupational therapy traditions created definitive barriers to client-centred practice and limited the therapists' possibilities to meet the needs of a diverse client groups. **Conclusion:** The study supports the significance of the theoretical concepts from the clients' perspectives. Some aspects of client-centred practice seem to be easier to apply than others and more in tune with occupational therapists' daily work habits. **Contribution to occupational therapy practice and research:** It is important for occupational therapists to understand the diversity of client-centred practice and to reflect upon their own attitudes and work processes in order to better meet occupational needs of their clients. Research is needed to develop effective ways of educating and training occupational therapists to be more conscious and proactive in practicing from a client-centred approach with individuals, groups, communities, and service systems.