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## **An investigation into the perceived effects of the active engagement of service user and carers in occupational therapy education**

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*Introduction:* There have been many UK government directives (Department of Health, 1998; National Health Service Executive, 1999; Secretary of State for Health, 1997), advocating partnership with clients. However, most research in this area has been conducted in nursing education, not occupational therapy (Felton and Stickley, 2004; Truman and Raines, 2002).

*Objectives:* To identify the current involvement of service users and carers within occupational therapy education in Wales by;

1. Investigating the nature of that involvement
2. Investigating any perceived effects of service user/carer involvement from the perspective of;

a. students

b. service users/carers

c. lecturing staff

*Methods:* Qualitative research, which investigates the subjective perspective of research participants can help develop a body of knowledge, (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), is currently lacking in this subject. A survey of academics views of current practice within three separate UK universities was carried out initially. In depth interviews were carried out with the students and service users/carers who had been in contact with the programmes. Academic staff were interviewed and commented on the analysis of the student and carer/service user data. Interviews were taped and transcribed. Data was analysed thematically and returned to participants for checking (Holloway, 2005).

*Results:* Main themes were;

- Students -
  - Valued the reality of the service users/carers stories
  - Did not feel responsible for the service user - the service user was more in charge
  - Moved out of their comfort zone in the student/client relationship
- Staff felt service user/carers involvement -
  - Offered a heightened awareness of discrimination issues
  - Influence the curriculum
  - Offered a change in the power base
  - Created problems around payment, access and reliability of attendance
- Service users/carers -

-Felt useful to the programme

-Enjoyed the experience

*Conclusions:* That the contributions which service users and carers can make to student awareness outweigh the often potential barriers to their inclusion in OT education programmes' content, design and selection processes.

*Contribution to the evidence base of occupational therapy education:* No English speaking Occupational Therapy research articles could be identified on this topic, therefore this investigation would appear to contribute a novel aspect to the evidence base.