

Practice Style Traits - Do they help explain evidence-based practice behaviors of rehabilitation professionals and students?

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Introduction: Great efforts are being made to understand the gap in knowledge translation (KT) from research to clinical practice. One possible reason for this gap may be a poor understanding of clinicians' practice style traits and how they influence practice behaviors.

Objectives: 1. To identify the prevalence of practice style traits (seekers, receptives, traditionalists, and pragmatists) in practicing physical therapists (PTs) and occupational therapists (OTs) and, in student clinicians; 2. to explore associations between these traits and practice behaviors, where practice behaviors are defined as the reasons for choosing assessments and interventions used in practice. The influence of more traditional personal and organizational factors on practice behaviors was also explored.

Methods: Cross-sectional survey of a representative random sample of 243 clinicians (117 OTs and 126 PTs) and a cohort of 92 OT and 86 PT student clinicians in Canadian. A telephone-administered validated interview questionnaire elicited information in four areas: practice style traits using the validated Practice Style Questionnaire, practice behaviors, and, personal and organizational factors. Students completed the same Questionnaire in a self-administered format.

Results: For both disciplines, the most prevalent trait was pragmatist and the least prevalent was seeker at <1%. Seekers were the most likely to use evidence-based reasons for choosing assessments, but this finding did not reach significance ($X^2=5.430$, $df= 3$; $p=0.14$). The most typical reason for choosing an intervention was that the clinician had learned it during professional training, an interesting finding given that roughly half of clinicians had >10 years experience. Of 21 potential explanatory variables, few explained clinicians' reasons for choosing assessments or interventions.

Conclusion: The low prevalence of seekers suggests that educators should carefully reconsider the implication of using KT strategies that cater primarily to individuals with this trait. Further research is needed to identify the impact of matching educational strategies to traits.

Contribution to practice: Understanding the prevalence of practice traits of health professionals is an important first step in designing effective KT strategies. A better understanding of traits enables refinement of strategies for recruitment, retention and leadership within our profession.