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Whom do we serve? Engaging service users and carers in occupational therapy education.

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Introduction:

The term 'service user' in the UK is synonymous with 'client' or 'patient' and recently health and social services have been encouraged to adopt a culture of being receptive to the views of those that they serve i.e. service users and their carers. This presents an opportunity to listen to their voices which in turn can influence our practice. It would seem a logical extension of this philosophy for institutions educating tomorrow's health and social care workforce in the UK to embrace a similar influence and include service users and carers to shape developments in education. We are encouraged within education to move from 'no involvement' with services users and carers to working in 'collaboration and partnership' with them.

Objectives:

To share how one educational establishment developed a project to engage service users and carers in their health-related programmes

To discuss the issues that arose in embedding these principles in occupational therapy education

Description:

The project at the Teesside University began in 2007 and the occupational therapy programmes began to look at how they involve users and carers in admission of students, design and approval of the curriculum, delivery of the curriculum and evaluation.

Results/ Discussion

A successful aspect has been the use of service user and carer narratives, where people have shared their life stories with students for considering the individual in terms of occupational performance and occupational therapy intervention. Engaging students with narratives could be a means of promoting client-centred practice through recognition of the issue of power in therapeutic relationships. The student or novice therapist may not be aware of the impact of the loss of power by the service user, if not told through their eyes.

Contribution to the practice / evidence base of occupational therapy:

Narratives may serve as an acknowledgement of complexity of the situation that a service user or carer comes to the therapeutic relationship with and reinforce the idea that complexity theory is an important concept to consider within the occupational therapy body of knowledge. It is after all, the service user that we 'serve'.