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## Sharing the world of occupation through online learning communities

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### Title:

Sharing the world of occupation through online learning communities

### Introduction:

Online learning communities are an innovative way for professionals who share a common interest in a topic, to network, link occupation theory and practice, develop knowledge and expertise, and share the world of occupation through the use of everyday technology. A Canadian university and community partnership project is exploring the potential of two types of online learning communities. The process of establishing and evaluating these online learning communities is presented.

**Objectives:** 1. To share our experience with establishing and evaluating two online learning communities a. Lunch and Learn teleconference series, and b. web based Communities of Practice. 2. To stimulate international interest in online learning communities as an innovative way for linking occupation, theory and practice, and enhancing practice scholarship.

**Description:** The rationale, objectives, benefits and challenges of using a simple teleconference and complex internet based system for sharing the world of occupation in rural and urban communities will be presented.

**Discussion:** As the practice of occupational therapy increasingly becomes a knowledge-based activity, the exchange of relevant knowledge becomes a key challenge to continuing competency. Online learning communities connect occupational therapists who share a passion for or common interest in a topic. Therapists discuss occupation, theory and practice issues, share expertise and develop practice scholarship through the use of technology.

**Conclusion:** Online learning communities are an innovative way to share the world of occupation within virtual practice groups. Through the use of everyday and educational technology, participants exchange information, discuss practice challenges, share expertise, provide mutual support, and develop practice and research capacity. Online learning communities facilitate the knowledge exchange process and develop practice scholarship. The potential for further development and expansion is great, and can serve to enhance practice internationally.

**Contribution to practice:** Online learning communities are based on collegial relationships and these relationships help support professional confidence, the development of practice scholarship to link occupation, theory and practice, and provide connections for sharing the world of occupation. Online learning communities promote best practice within an environment of mutual support.