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Use of intuition in occupational therapy mental health practice

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Intuition has been defined as "immediate possession of knowledge; and knowledge independent of the linear reasoning process" (Rew, 1986, p. 23). There has been no publication specifically exploring intuition in occupational therapy practice.

Objectives

To explore mental health occupational therapists' understanding of intuition, the influences on intuition, and how intuition is used in their professional practice.

Method

Grounded theory methodology was used. A purposive sample of nine occupational therapists practicing in mental health participated in semi-structured interviews. Interviews were transcribed, and analysed using constant comparative method of analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 2007).

Results

Findings are presented in relation to the three research questions. Participants defined intuition as instinctive, innate clinical reasoning, and a gut feeling, which is consistent with other literature in health sciences. The components of intuition were 'inner knowing', 'pattern recognition' and 'awareness and use of one's emotions'. In terms of the influences on participants' use of intuition, it was found that experience, skill in understanding and empathising with other's emotions, familiarity with clients, trusting one's intuitions, and required speed of action all influenced the use of intuition in mental health practice. Finally, the research revealed that therapists used intuition as an additional source of information, to guide practice, to engage clients, and to manage risk. These findings indicated interactive, procedural, conditional and pragmatic reasoning may be influenced by intuition.

Conclusion

Intuition is used by occupational therapists practicing in mental health. Understanding its components, influencing factors and subsequent use can assist therapists to utilise intuition, in conjunction with clinical reasoning, to promote professional practice.

Contribution to the practice

Understanding intuition and its role in therapy may afford clinicians greater insights to their practice, and assist in educating occupational therapy students and novice therapists, in order to promote the transition from novice to expert therapist status.

References

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