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Occupational Therapy interventions in Palliative Care towards the end of life

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Introduction:

Towards the end of life the OT practice model may be challenged when loss of functions and roles is the natural outcome expected. Therefore, how does OT approach a patient at the end of life?

Objectives:

The paper will describe the OT practice model in palliative care and possible interventions towards the end of life stage.

Description:

Three stages of OT interventions in Palliative Care can be described:

- 1) Early palliative care: The patient may need assistance to do everyday life tasks and meaningful activities.
- 2) Progression: Deterioration in functional status occurs and the need for assistance increases. The patient may spend more time in bed, and is likely to be able to perform activities in the dimension of being and belonging.
- 3) End of life: The patient becomes bed bound and requires moderate to maximum assistance for everyday life. They may have an altered state of mind.

Discussion:

The OT practice model in stage one has a client centred approach to facilitate the process of adaptation to a varying functional status and the search for meaningful activities to perform (considering all dimensions of meaning: being, doing, belonging, becoming).

In progressing to stages two and three the focus of intervention shift from encouraging engagement in an active routine to facilitating the process of disengagement from life.

Over these stages, OT role has a strong emphasis on the family as:

- 1- Problem solver
- 2- Educator
- 3- Net-worker/communicator
- 4- Facilitator through the search for meaningful activities.

Conclusion:

OT interventions towards the end of life have potential for a deep impact in contributing to a good quality of life until such a time as death; starting to prepare the patient and family for death facilitating the process of disengaging from life and activities and adjusting to an increasing physical dependency on others.

Contribution to the practice:

There are specific skills to be learned in this field of practice. Clarity about the goals of the service provided is essential in understanding the practice model towards the end of life in addressing the patients' and families needs.