

Students assess post earthquake occupational needs

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This paper will describe a rehabilitation programme involving occupational therapy students in SiChuan, China for earthquake survivors with severe fractures and amputations ten months post earthquake.

A major earthquake hit the ChengDu region in May 2008. Local and global rescue and recover efforts assisted thousands of people. Rehabilitation teams came from every province to offer 3-6 months of dedicated treatment in local hospitals and clinics set up in temporary housing areas. A center set up through the efforts of the Hong Kong Red Cross and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University offers free services for survivors of the earthquake with orthopaedic conditions. Occupational therapy students on fieldwork placement from the nearby province of Yunnan used task analysis and the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM) to understand the requirements of farmers to return to their former occupations.

The students were able to ascertain the occupational needs of their clients and establish a baseline for treatment. Being unfamiliar with the specific activities undertaken on the farms in that region, the students involved the clients in describing the tools, the activities, and the actions required. The students were then able to simulate or actuate these activities for assessment and treatment, including areas for such activities as carrying heavy water buckets, traversing rough ground of temporary housing and village roads, and assessing peoples' ability to carry out farming chores according to traditional approaches. Further assessment and treatment areas will eventually be developed for home construction, shoveling, and bricklaying. Case examples of project development will be shared.

Offering students the opportunity to address the needs of people affected by disaster and to put into practice an occupation based programme facilitated their understanding of the role of the occupational therapist in this emerging field of practice.