

Using Action Research as a Means of Facilitating an Evaluation of Integrated Local Authority and NHS Occupational Therapy Services in an Urban Area of Scotland

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Introduction

The integration of care services has been a key concept of policy makers in most developed countries, and therefore it is unsurprising to find the UK governments focused on this agenda. Action research has been adopted as a means of facilitating an evaluation of the integration of occupational therapy services across one NHS Board and local authority in a large urban area of Scotland. The choice of this approach was informed by the participatory and democratic values of action research combined with its ability to achieve change and improvement (Meyer, 2000).

Objectives

1. To present a review of action research as an emerging methodology in occupational therapy and to locate this within the wider action research literature;
2. To present findings of an action research study which identifies the progress, barriers and facilitators in relation to the integration of occupational therapy services.

Method

Ethics approval was initially obtained. A review of the literature from 1990-2009 was completed, using keywords 'action research' and 'occupational therapy'. Electronic databases accessed included CINAHL, Pubmed, AMED and PsychINFO. Focus groups were conducted with seven groups of occupational therapists. Analysis was conducted to identify the learning required to support the evaluation.

Results

The results presented offer insights into the nature and progress of integration as well as identifying the learning needs amongst participants in relation to their preparedness for undertaking evaluation. These results have continued to inform the subsequent cycles of action and reflection throughout the study.

Conclusion

Whilst the term 'integration' is used extensively both within and outwith occupational therapy, there are a range of perspectives about the meaning, purpose, value and outcomes of integration. When proposing the integration of services, it is useful to clarify an underpinning theoretical model, process and desired outcomes.

Contribution to the practice / evidence base of occupational therapy

This paper identifies some of the challenges and successes of action research in occupational therapy. Action research is identified as a tool which can assist in bridging the theory-practice gap.

References

Meyer J (2000) Using Qualitative Methods in Health Related Action Research,
British Medical Journal, 320 (7228), 178-81.

