

Developing Occupational Therapy services in Central Vietnam: In a government hospital rehabilitation department and within a community based NGO (Non-government organisation).

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Introduction; I spent seven months working within a small NGO in Hoi An, central Vietnam. Working with disabled children who did not have access or the required finances to seek help from existing health facilities. I then spent one month working within the rehabilitation department of a large city centre hospital in Da Nang city, mainly with CVA victims and road traffic accident trauma patients.

Objectives; My objective within the NGO, was to develop the skills and knowledge base of the existing Vietnamese physiotherapists, conduct a needs analysis of the service for disabled children and develop sustainable working strategies which were culturally applicable for the organisation. My role within the government hospital was to use existing physiotherapy staff to develop an Occupational Therapy service within the rehabilitation centre.

Description/Report; Both roles required an understanding of existing working practices, cultural and local belief systems, a working knowledge of educational styles and influences on practice, and many hours of exhausting communications via translators, colleagues and patients. The development of adaptive equipment and aids, using local resources and basic problem solving strategies became an essential way to promote these 'new found' OT skills, and encourage others to demonstrate independent clinical reasoning and problem solving skills.

Results/Discussion; Working within the different culture presented many challenges, including consideration of a 'need for independence', cultural, societal and financial implications for engagement in treatment, a comparison of differing individual value systems, and a constant evaluation and re-evaluation of communication between all individuals involved within the therapy process.

Conclusion; Developing services within the two extremes of the 'health' system in Vietnam, afforded some clear insights into how the culture, environment and different societal value systems impact upon the therapy process in this area. Continued development of these services, have been planned for 2009/10, encouraging liaison between both Eastern and Western Therapists.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy; Combining health related concepts and ideals, with the pragmatic problem solving approach of and core competencies of occupational therapy, has helped to develop and promote OT in an area that previously had no service.