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Inter-rater reliability of occupational therapists using the International Classification of Disability, Function, and Health

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Introduction:

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) was published by the World Health Organization in 2001 to provide a uniform and standard language and framework for the description and impact of health and health-related states on peoples' lives (WHO, 2001). An important purpose of the ICF is to facilitate communication between health practitioners. However, occupational therapists have been slow to implement the ICF in practice in part because of a lack of knowledge about the ICF and inconsistent interpretations of its codes and qualifiers.

Objectives:

The purpose of this research project was to examine if a set of ICF "classification rules" can increase the reliability of ICF coding occupational therapists.

Methods:

Two occupational therapists familiar with the ICF back coded questions from a battery of standardized assessments used in a community-based setting to the ICF. Classification rules were developed by matching assessment responses to ICF qualifiers. Disagreements between the therapists were discussed and resolved before establishing the final set of classification rules. The final set contained 59 codes and qualifiers for the assessment battery. Two occupational therapists and one occupational therapy student with an introductory knowledge of the ICF then used a self-directed learning packet to increase their knowledge on the purpose and use of the ICF. Finally, all occupational therapists coded 10 clinical cases using the classification rules, and inter-rater reliability was assessed.

Results and Discussion:

The inter-rater reliability of the therapists was calculated and the intra-class correlation coefficient for the standardized assessments was .976 with a 95% confidence interval of .973-.978 indicating strong reliability.

Conclusion:

With minimal ICF training, occupational therapists can use classification rules to improve coding reliability with standardized assessments.