Exploring Occupational Therapy Roles In Primary Mental Health Care Settings

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BACKGROUND

Occupational therapists have made a concerted effort to advocate for the inclusion of occupational therapy within primary mental health care settings. For example, occupational therapists have written provincial and national position papers, and participated in Canadian steering committees.1,2

Recently, the Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists developed occupational therapy roles based on client populations including providing service to clients who have mental health concerns.3 However, few occupational therapists have been included in primary mental health care teams. Another approach to occupational therapy role development in primary mental health care may be to identify primary care provider’s (PCP) needs for collaboration. Exploring the needs of PCPs may contextualize gaps in existing services and provide an opportunity for occupational therapy to align role development with expressed needs.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this qualitative study was to: 1) explore PCP’s self-identified need in primary health care settings where Shared Mental Health Care is available, and 2) identify occupational therapy roles that would address the PCP’s self-identified need for interprofessional collaboration.

METHODS

Recruitment: All PCPs (N=110) from a regional health authority who participate in the Shared Mental Health Care are available, and 2) identify occupational therapy roles that would address the PCP’s self-identified need for interprofessional collaboration.

Data Collection: Participants completed a socio-demographic form and participated in a semi-structured 60-minute interview.

Data Analysis: The first author conducted line-by-line coding, following focused coding and extensive memo writing for each participant transcript. Next, memos were analyzed within and then across participants. Finally, memos were sorted and codes were collapsed into categories. Throughout this process codes and categories were compared to each other within and between participants. Categories were reviewed and validated by the second author. Occupational therapy role development in primary mental health care settings was explored in the context of the PCPs’ identified needs using the Profile of Occupational Therapist in Canada.4

RESULTS

PCPs’ Identified Need

PCPs want to spend less clinic time counseling or preparing clients for mental health services. They report spending a lot of time convincing clients of the benefits of mental health services. Additionally, working with current care providers to identify service gaps provides opportunity for occupational therapists to develop collaborative relationships that may contribute to future role development.

CONCLUSIONS

Occupational therapists may approach role development in a primary mental health care setting by working with PCPs to identify specific target gaps. Once service gaps are identified, the occupational therapists may use the Profile of Occupational Therapists in Canada to assist with role development. Examining the needs of those providing existing services may contextualize service gaps and provide more direction for occupational therapy role development.

EXAMPLES OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ROLES IN PRIMARY MENTAL HEALTH SETTING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PCPs’ Identified Need</th>
<th>OT Profile Role</th>
<th>OT Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparing clients for counseling or psychotropic consultation</td>
<td>Scholarly Practitioner Collaborator</td>
<td>Preparing clients for counseling or psychotropic consultation</td>
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<tr>
<td>As scholarly practitioners OTs may become familiar with evidence that focuses on engaging in occupations to improve mental health.5,6</td>
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<td>OTs may collaborate with clients to focus the treatment on occupational issues and explore the client’s need for mental health services in this context.</td>
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<td>OT’s expertise in enabling occupation may provide an alternative to talk therapy.</td>
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<td>OTs may prioritize the client’s occupational issues; this means of therapy may increase the client’s engagement in working towards improved mental health.7</td>
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<td>As collaborators using a client-centered approach OTs may explore the stigma a shame associated with seeking mental health services.</td>
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<td>As change agents, OTs may develop a clinician-specific stigma reducing programs using evidence-based methods such as education and exposure to those with mental illness.8,9 Increasing the level of knowledge about mental health may positively impact the community, improving the overall health of families.10</td>
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<td>As change agents OTs may engage with clients and PCPs to explore social issues and occupational injustices facing individuals.11,12 Together, health care providers and clients may explore approaches to advocate for changes at micro, meso, or macro levels.11,12</td>
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3<sup>3</sup>Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 64, 121-P. Exploring stigma focused coding and extensive memo writing for each participant transcript.

4<sup>4</sup>Emergent Categories:

5<sup>5</sup>Strategies Framework.

6<sup>6</sup>Consultations to Mental Health Care Providers:

7<sup>7</sup>PCPs may explore the stigma a shame associated with seeking mental health services.

8<sup>8</sup>As collaborators using a client-centered approach OTs may explore the stigma a shame associated with seeking mental health services.

9<sup>9</sup>As change agents, OTs may develop a clinician-specific stigma reducing programs using evidence-based methods such as education and exposure to those with mental illness. Increasing the level of knowledge about mental health may positively impact the community, improving the overall health of families.

10<sup>10</sup>As change agents OTs may engage with clients and PCPs to explore social issues and occupational injustices facing individuals. Together, health care providers and clients may explore approaches to advocate for changes at micro, meso, or macro levels.

11<sup>11</sup>Identified Need

12<sup>12</sup>Identified need in primary health care settings where Shared Mental Health Care is available.