Advancing Occupational Therapy in Workplace Health and Wellbeing: A scoping review

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Background Information

Workplace injury is a massive monetary, physical and psychological burden on Canadians. Workers and organizations can benefit from a primary prevention model in line with health care trends. With a holistic focus, occupational therapists (OTs) can enable a culture of workplace well being. There is a need for cohesive evidence to support this evolving role of OTs in the workplace. Creating a comprehensive definition of workplace health and well being was a necessary first step towards analysis. This new definition reflects principles of primary prevention and over all worker wellness. A scoping review of international literature outlines the current and potential role of OTs in the workplace. This synthesis will also inform the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) position statement on occupational therapy (OT) involvement in the workplace.

Purpose

This paper presents a synthesis of existing knowledge regarding OT involvement in the development and maintenance of worker and workplace health.

Methods

A scoping review based on the methodological framework of Arksey & O’Malley 1 was used to determine the evidence to support the involvement of OT in enabling workplace health and well-being. Data was analyzed based on study designs, outcome measures, and OT involvement in primary, secondary, tertiary prevention or preparing for employment. The enabling skills and collaborative models used by OTs for evaluation and intervention were also examined.

Key Search Terms

• Occupational therapy
• Workplace
• Health
• Well-being

Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

• Peer reviewed research articles
• Evidence of OT involvement in workplace health & well-being
• English articles
• Published between January 1992 & June 2012

Defining Workplace Health & Well-being

Workplace health and well-being was defined for this review as an environment or culture that is created by workers and employers where all workers are enabled to achieve the demands of their work in a safe and supportive context. Workers are enabled to optimize the use of their potential, including their skills, capacities and resources, to maximize productivity. Physical, social and psychological health is promoted and supported through an environment that encourages respect, a sense of belonging and autonomy. Workers and employers will collaborate to meet both individual and workplace goals.

Findings

OT Involvement

Primary Prevention N=5
Preparing for Employment N=9
Tertiary Prevention N=29
Secondary Prevention N=11

Outcome Measures

• Return to Work
• Productivity
• Well-being
• Maintaining Work
• Safety

- Return to Work (RTW): rate of RTW (work resumption) & obtaining employment
- Productivity: pain/fatigue, productivity, cost, presenteeism, absenteeism, functional status, skill training outcome & decreased hospital visits
- Well-being: quality of life, work satisfaction, depression, work stress, self-esteem & perception of disease or condition
- Maintaining Work: sustained participation in work & job retention
- Safety: safety (body posture and biomechanics at work)

Study Design

• The majority of studies were quantitative (74%). Of these, 7 were RCTs

Enablement Skills

Collaborative Model

• OTs only (35%)
• Multidisciplinary (46%)
• Interdisciplinary (13%)
• Transdisciplinary (2%)
• Not specified (2%)

Implications

• OT intervention is currently focused primarily on tertiary and secondary prevention. It is necessary to stay current with health care trends and adopt primary prevention in practice. Doing so will enable better outcomes for workers before conditions arise.
• Enablement skills are strongly reflected in OT workplace interventions. The majority of research articles outlined skills that are more inter-relational in nature, including collaborating, educating, coaching, and engaging.
• This evidence will be used to develop a position statement for the CAOT. It will inform policy and practice development for OT interventions in workplace health and well-being.

Limitations

• Limitations include the 20 year inclusion criteria and possible subjectivity of authors during article selection and data extraction.

Future Research

• Future research is needed to enhance the understanding of mental health, primary prevention, and OT roles on teams, while further specifying and defining outcome measures and enablement skills.

References


Further Information

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