Systematic Review: Occupational Therapy and Chronic Conditions in Primary Care

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Health care costs are high and are an ever-increasing concern on a societal and personal level in the United States.  
- 75% of all health care costs are spent by those with chronic conditions.  
- People with chronic conditions make up 84% of “high users” of the emergency departments across the United States.  
- 35% percent of emergency department visits are considered avoidable and amount to 18 billion dollars.

The effect of high use of healthcare services by persons with chronic conditions is evident and is a concern.

Occupational therapists provide evidence-based interventions to treat chronic conditions to improve independence and self-satisfaction. Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) was enacted in 2010 with a goal of changing health care into a more affordable and available field of services.

Creating bundled packages for costs, rather than traditional ‘fee-for-services’

Using a preventative and evidenced based approach

Objectives

- Define occupational therapy’s role in the primary care setting with a focus on those with chronic conditions using Occupational Therapy Practice Framework terminology.
- Describe the current evidence on occupational performance related to occupational therapy services in primary care.
- Discuss the future implications for occupational therapists working in primary care.

Methods

- Databases searched: CINHAL, Ovid Medline, and OT Search.
- All databases were searched between January and February 2014, with the last search completed on February 25, 2014.
- The search terms included: occupational therapy, primary care, quality of life, primary care setting. Truncation symbols (e.g., * and $) and broad terms were selected in order to include as many articles as possible due to the novelty of this topic.
- 43 articles were screened in full text, resulting in 13 articles to be critiqued.

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Evidence</th>
<th>Number of Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Improving Outcomes

- All level V articles discuss how occupational therapy in primary care can improve outcomes
- Decrease the need for further services
- Shifting from a traditional medical model to a preventive approach
- Prevent functional decline for a longer period of time

Decreasing Healthcare Costs

- Three of the level V articles allude that occupational therapy in primary care can decrease healthcare costs
- “Bundled service” versus a “fee-for-service”
- Reduce the personal cost of treatment for individuals who are in need of service
- Increase accessibility to necessary services for all patients
- Lower costs by assessing patients in a time efficient manner

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

- Only peer-reviewed articles were utilized
- Studies published 2000 and prior were excluded
- Authors created an unbiased form to critique level V articles
- Librarians at Thomas Jefferson University

Limitations

- Many of the articles were from international resources
- Created challenges interpreting various definitions of “occupational therapy” and “primary care”
- Many of articles would refer to a government policy but not expand in detail on the inner details of that said policy

Conclusions and Implications for the Future

- Further research to justify and explain an occupational therapist’s role in a primary care setting
- Increase evidence based research
- Four countries have occupational therapists staffed in a primary care office currently
- Gap in the evidence to securely define the role of an occupational therapist

References

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3. Pepe et al., 2007
5. Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, 2009
8. Godfrey, 2000
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12. Tse, Penman, & Simms, 2003
14. Lambeek et al., 2010