Differences between OT and OTA Student Perception of Professional Responsibilities, Collaboration, and Roles: A Pilot Study

Rachel Diamant, PhD, Julie Carlson, Jasmine Hawkins, Christina Murillo, Auston Robinson, Carley Rudoff, Katie Shaw

BACKGROUND

Occupational Therapists (OT) and Occupational Therapy Assistants (OTA) are expected to collaborate and work together effectively as practitioners. OT and OTA professionals need to have a clear understanding of job expectations and role delineations. Research shows that interprofessional relationships between OT and OTA can result in positive teamwork and achievement of client-centered objectives (Johnston, Ruppert & Peloquin, 2013). Collaboration between both professional roles is encouraged through effective communication, shared learning, trust, and respect. Generating opportunities for students to collaborate during their fieldwork experiences increases their skills to collaborate as future practitioners (Costa, Hololinsky, & Sauerwald, 2012). To evaluate the development of the intra-professional relationship, an understanding of how the OT-OTA partnership is perceived by students during the education process is warranted.

PURPOSE

Understanding student perception of the intra-professional relationship and the development of the OT and OTA partnership. Outcomes of the study could help to inform OT-OTA education that prepares students for collaborative practice.

Research Question: What are the differences between OT and OTA students’ perceptions of the development of professional responsibilities, collaboration, and roles?

Hypothesis: There are differences between OT and OTA students’ perceptions of the development of professional responsibilities, collaboration, and roles.

STUDY DESIGN

A survey was developed and used to examine the differences between OT and OTA student perceptions of professional responsibilities, collaboration, and roles. Participants completed an online survey using SurveyMonkey®.

SURVEY DESCRIPTION

The survey questions were developed from the standards directed by AOTA (2014). Survey questions related to role delineations and responsibilities between OT and OTA in the work setting. Survey included 55 questions. Questions were divided into categories about referral/screening, evaluation, treatment planning and intervention, reassessments, communication, discharge planning and termination, documentation, quality improvement, supervision, and department administration. Participants were asked to identify whether they perceived OT, OTA, or both practitioners were responsible for the role/function. Three ranking questions were randomized to eliminate categorical bias.

Open-ended questions, informally screens individuals (referral/screening), administers standardized assessments (evaluation), and develops appropriate home and community program (discharge planning and termination). Limited geographical areas for collection of survey responses.

RESULTS

Participant Demographics:

- Participants from A.T. Still University, Midwestern University, Brown Mackie College of Phoenix/Tucson, and PIMA Medical Institute of Phoenix/Tucson: N = 60
- OT students (n = 39) and OTA students (n = 21).
- Age range: 18 to 25 years (n=24), 26 to 30 years (n=19), 31 to 39 years (n=11), 40+ years (n=9).
- Number of fieldwork experiences completed: N=64, no fieldwork experience (n=16), completed level I fieldwork (n=36), completed level II fieldwork (n=7).

Area of Disagreement

- 26 out of 41 questions were over 75% of agreement between OT and OTA students
- 38 out of 41 questions were over 50% of agreement between OT and OTA students
- 3 out of 41 questions were less than 50% agreement between OT and OTA students

Charts of agreement with AOTA standards

Participants perceived by OT/OTA students: mutual respect, effective communication, competence in OT, and OTA, or both practitioners were responsible for the role/function. Three ranking questions were randomized to eliminate categorical bias. Questions related to role delineations and responsibilities between OT and OTA in the work setting. Participants were asked to identify whether they perceived OT, OTA, or both practitioners were responsible for the role/function. Three ranking questions were randomized to eliminate categorical bias.

Survey distribution:

Survey Monkey® was used to distribute the survey. The survey was sent to OT and OTA programs directors of four accredited OT and OTA programs (Costa, Hololinsky, & Sauerwald, 2012). To evaluate the development of the intra-professional relationship, an understanding of how the OT-OTA partnership is perceived by students during the education process is warranted.

PARTICIPANTS

Inclusion Criteria: Students, 18 years of age or older, currently enrolled full time in an accredited Occupational Therapy (OT) or Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA) program

Participant Demographics:

- Participants from A.T. Still University, Midwestern University, Brown Mackie College of Phoenix/Tucson, and PIMA Medical Institute of Phoenix/Tucson: N = 60
- OT students (n = 39) and OTA students (n = 21).
- Age range: 18 to 25 years (n=24), 26 to 30 years (n=19), 31 to 39 years (n=11), 40+ years (n=9).
- Number of fieldwork experiences completed: N=64, no fieldwork experience (n=16), completed level I fieldwork (n=36), completed level II fieldwork (n=7).

PERCENT AGREEMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

- 26 out of 41 questions were over 75% of agreement between OT and OTA students
- 38 out of 41 questions were over 50% of agreement between OT and OTA students
- 3 out of 41 questions were less than 50% agreement between OT and OTA students

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Increase survey participation; Survey additional OT/OTA programs
- Develop a more condensed concise survey
- Pre and Post survey at the beginning and end of educational program

REFERENCES

2. American Journal of Occupational Therapy (1) 1-4