Overcoming obstacles to occupational therapy service delivery in developing communities: Cultural considerations and case examples.

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Case example 1

- Formal qualitative study of an American occupational therapist in Dominican Republic
- What was the experience of an American OT working to establish an OT service in Dominican Republic?
Case example 2

- Supervision of Australian Occupational Therapy students in Solomon Islands
- Informal information gathering—emails, conversation, written reports.
Solomon Islands

Source: Personal photo of OT student
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>Dominican Republic</th>
<th>Solomon Islands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>20 million</td>
<td>290 million</td>
<td>9 million</td>
<td>0.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>US$26,900</td>
<td>US$36,300</td>
<td>US$6,300</td>
<td>US$1,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Life Span</td>
<td>80 yrs</td>
<td>77 yrs</td>
<td>69 yrs</td>
<td>71 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Rate</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Geographic, 2006
## Case scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case 1</th>
<th>Case 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracted and paid by local authorities</td>
<td>Aid agencies/Personal contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBR model</td>
<td>IBR &amp; CBR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing PT</td>
<td>Existing PT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 months &amp; Spanish sp.</td>
<td>1 meeting with SI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OT student
Three main themes

1. Challenges of life in a community developing human services

2. Local workers: Work skills and professional behaviour

3. Behaviour and expectations of clients attending therapy
Challenges of life in a community developing human services

Case 1

- Managing without material resources
- Environmental challenges
- Delayed start to rehabilitation

Case 2

- Improvising/problem solving resources
- Environmental challenges
- Preventable debilitating conditions
Local workers: Work skills and professional behaviour

Case 1

- Educating the local workers
- Professional behaviours of local workers

Case 2

- Local workers lacked skills
- Local workers needed training
Behaviour and expectations of clients attending therapy

Case 1
- Social behaviours
- Family care reducing the need for independent functioning
- Perceptions of the therapist and therapy
- Attitudes to disability

Case 2
- Social behaviours
- Family interdependence
- Perceptions of OT
- Expectations and attitudes towards people with disabilities
Successful endeavors

Case 1
- Educating local workers and implement change
- Provide therapy and empower people with disabilities
- Provision of equipment
- Set up department

Case 2
- Educating/being educated by local workers
- Provide therapy and accommodate interventions
- Funding for equipment
- Lead to 3 positions in AOT newsletter
Challenges related to differences between OT and clients

• **Beliefs**-meaning of disability; effect of disability on roles and occupations; kinfolk structure; purpose of therapy; life is difficult.

• **Values**-family strength and unity; friendship and humour; personal causation; time and efficiency.
Core concepts within our profession that do not easily transcend cultural barriers

- Personal autonomy
- Performance and achievement in occupation
- Goal directed intervention
Across cultures: Occupational preferences and tools do vary

Source: Maria Stetzel (Siberia) & Bruce Dale (Mexico) NG 2006
Being an outsider

Source: James Davies, The Age, 04/07/06
Actions that are required by the OT profession

- Beyond cultural competency
- Closer ties with anthropology, medical anthropology and studies of the meanings of disease and disability in other cultures
- Support students in remote placements
  - student criteria
  - manuals and preparation exercises
  - often the first step in dev OT/disability services in general.
Actions...

- Build resources (OTION)
- Address issue of servicing clients with differing values and beliefs to those embedded in the OT profession
- Importance of supporting service development in all communities who request/offer collaboration
- Expand and update ethics
From the moment of birth

Every human being wants happiness and wants to avoid suffering. In this we are all the same.

Dalai Lama
Sincere thanks to:

- Dawn Hudson OTR/L
- Ana Burggraaf OT
- People of Dominican Republic and Solomon Islands whose stories we learn from.
- Penny Moyers Ed OTR FAOTA
References

• Photographs from National Geographic website, accessed 16/06/06: http://www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/


Learning can be painful in the beginning...