

Occupational therapists' experiences of career progression following promotion

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Background

Effective occupational therapy practice requires a competent workforce, key to which is effective leadership at the clinical interface. In Victorian health organisations many of these leadership and support functions are performed by Grade 2 and Grade 3 staff. Promotion to these levels is not an automatic process related to years of experience. Individuals seeking career advancement need to apply for and be successfully appointed to a position. In a large metropolitan health service, anecdotal information indicated that staff were often unsure about their readiness to consider more senior positions, and did not have a comprehensive understanding of role requirements. Feedback from staff promoted to higher positions indicated reduced awareness and clarity regarding the role scope and impact, with associated decreased confidence for role performance. This research sought to investigate issues and common themes for staff moving between classification levels.

Methods

A qualitative approach was adopted to answer the research question, with semi-structured interviews utilised to gather data. Eleven purposefully selected participants were interviewed as part of this study. Categories representing the most common themes and topics were identified and consolidated by the research team. The credibility, dependability and confirmability of this study were addressed.

Results

Common themes were identified, relating to staff readiness to progress and confidence in performance of new roles. The four main themes elicited from the data were: (i) Readiness for progression, (ii) Tools and processes, (iii) Expectations and (iv) What I wish I had known first. Within these themes, related findings were also identified by both Grade 2 and Grade 3 staff.

Discussion

This study identifies key areas for consideration, by individuals and organisations, in relation to succession planning and supporting individuals during role transition, and provides a basis for further research in allied health workforce development.