

“Evaluating occupational therapist’s views and perceptions of professional self-care”

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Background

The issue of staff self-care when working with people living with a terminal condition is well documented within medical and nursing research. There is however a paucity of literature regarding these challenges for Occupational Therapists.

A recent study into the burnout experiences of Occupational Therapists revealed that staff with a high degree of emotional exhaustion reported lower use of coping strategies, resulting in decreased physical self-care and increased risk of burnout.

Methods

The aim of this exploratory study was to understand Occupational Therapy clinicians’ views and perceptions of professional self-care when working with terminal patients dealing with end of life issues, and awareness of available resources to assist with ‘self-care’.

An ‘Occupational Therapy self-care’ survey was developed, focusing on key issues identified in the literature. Fifty-five Occupational Therapy clinicians completed and returned the survey. Data was analysed thematically for categories and key themes.

Results

Results indicate that less experienced clinicians are most affected when working with terminal patients and are more likely to access support services. In comparison with more experienced clinicians, they reported a limited awareness of resources and lower use of personal coping strategies such as mindfulness, placing them at risk of burnout. These findings may also have relevance to other Allied Health disciplines.

Discussion

Based on the findings, the Occupational Therapy service is implementing strategies targeting the development of resilience and self-care capacity by staff. The effectiveness of these strategies will be evaluated post intervention by repeating the ‘Occupational Therapy self-care’ survey.