

Perceptions of Nursing and Medical Students on Occupational Therapy in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT: Despite teamwork has become a trend in healthcare since late 20th century, insufficient or nonexistent teamwork were profound in many medical accidents. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of nursing and medical students on occupational therapy and their role in Taiwan. Students of nursing (n=67) and medicine (n=53) were recruited to complete a self-reported questionnaire developed by our research team. Data were presented with frequency distribution. The 58% of nursing students and 32% of medical students stated that they did not understand the role and function of occupational therapists. Moreover, 90% of nursing students and 81% of medical students admitted that they had few opportunities to work with occupational therapists in their fieldwork. Most of nursing students (84%) and medical students (75%) rarely collaborated with occupational therapy staff in their patient care team training. However, 70% of nursing students and 66% of medical students showed their needs for occupational therapy services, particularly in evaluations and interventions of activities of daily living programme for patients. The results indicated that a great proportion of nursing and medical students have less cognizance of role and function of occupational therapists and also fewer opportunities to collaborate with occupational therapists. However, they showed special needs from occupational therapy for patient care. Therefore, it is important to develop a clinical teamwork education programme to facilitate teamwork between occupational therapists and other medical professionals.

Keywords: Nursing students, medical students, perceptions, occupational therapy

Introduction

Teamwork has become a trend in healthcare since late 20th century (Baker *et al.*, 2008). The Institute of Medicine (IOM) of United States reported that the insufficient or nonexistent teamwork has made many medical accidents occurred (Lerner *et al.*, 2009). Due to the specialized tasks of various professionals and the increasing complexity associated with treatment options, teamwork becomes much important for effective patient management for appropriate healthcare outcomes and patient safety. Previous studies revealed that

teamwork education held in early year of education program could facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration. Therefore, medical organizations and educational institutions have the responsibility to take the lead in developing and teaching teamwork in healthcare (Hall and Weaver, 2001). Consequently, it is imperative to implement a curriculum that teaches and promotes teamwork within medical education.

Teamwork education facilitates the students to look at a task from the perspective of

other professions as well as from their own (The UK Centre for the advancement of Inter professional Education [CAIPE], 2002). In addition to nursing and medical staff, occupational therapists are also the member of teamwork involving in direct patient care. It is important that team members should have adequate knowledge of each profession. Meanwhile, a successful teamwork could be achieved by cognizance of their own and the other team members' professional roles, comprehension of communication, and collaboration in taking care of patients. However, from the literature, we found that nursing and medical students exhibited typical views with inadequate knowledge on occupational therapy (Carpenter, 1995; Hallin *et al.*, 2009). This condition could also happen in Taiwan. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the nursing and medical students' perceptions on occupational therapy in Taiwan.

Materials and Methods

Two groups of students from Nursing and Medical Departments of National Cheng Kung University in Taiwan were recruited in this study. Nursing students were at their junior and senior year. Medical students were at their clerk (6th year) and intern year (7th year). At a 67% response rate, students of nursing (n=67) and medical (n=60) completed a questionnaire developed by our research team. The questionnaire was answered anonymously and confidentially. The questionnaire is a self-reported instrument and includes three categories: (1)

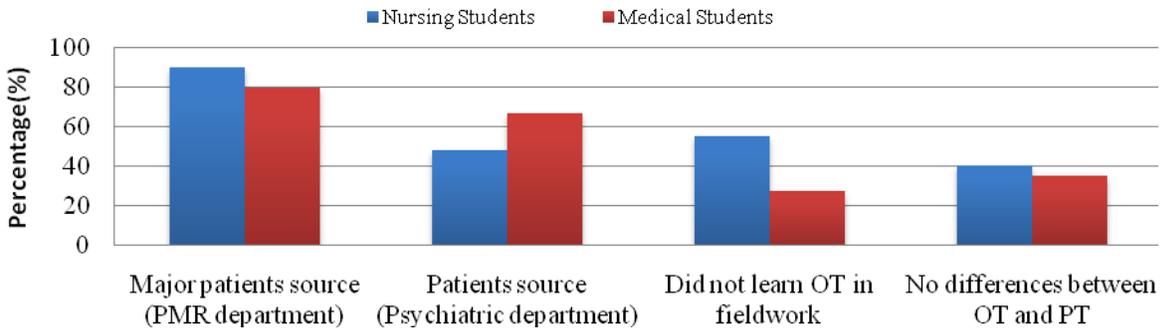
role and function of occupational therapy; (2) nursing and medical students' perspectives of occupational therapy; and (3) the current status of teamwork practice. The selection of items and validation of the questionnaires have been reviewed and improved by experts from departments of nursing, medical, and occupational therapy. Statistical Package Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0 was used to analyze the data. The results were presented with frequency distributions.

Results

Role and function of occupational therapy

As in **FIGURE 1**, nursing students knew that most patients served by occupational therapists were from physical medicine and rehabilitation (PMR) department (90%) and the second most were from psychiatric department (48%). Similarly, medical students knew that most patients served by occupational therapists were from PMR department (80%) and the second most were from Psychiatric department (67%). However, 55% of nursing students and 27% of medical students stated that they did not learn the role and function of occupational therapists in the fieldwork. They knew less detail in role and function of occupational therapy. Specifically, 40% nursing students and 35% medical students admitted that they could not recognize the differences between occupational therapy (OT) and physical therapy (PT).

FIGURE 1- Role and function of occupational therapy perceived by nursing and medical students



Nursing and medical students' perspectives on occupational therapy

84% nursing students and 92% medical students expressed positive view on the unique function of occupational therapy profession. They recognized the importance of occupational therapy service and would encourage patients to receive occupational therapy intervention if necessary. According to the fieldwork experience of nursing and medical students, 70% of them reported that

the most priority needs for occupational therapy service is evaluation and training in activities of daily living (**FIGURE 2**). For the OT service, the students rated a 10-point visual analogous scale, which was ranged from “very unsatisfied (1)” to “very satisfied (10)” on satisfaction with occupational therapy service. The average score from 6.1 to 6.5 points are from nursing and medical students respectively (**FIGURE 3**).

FIGURE 2- The perspectives on occupational therapy of nursing and medical students

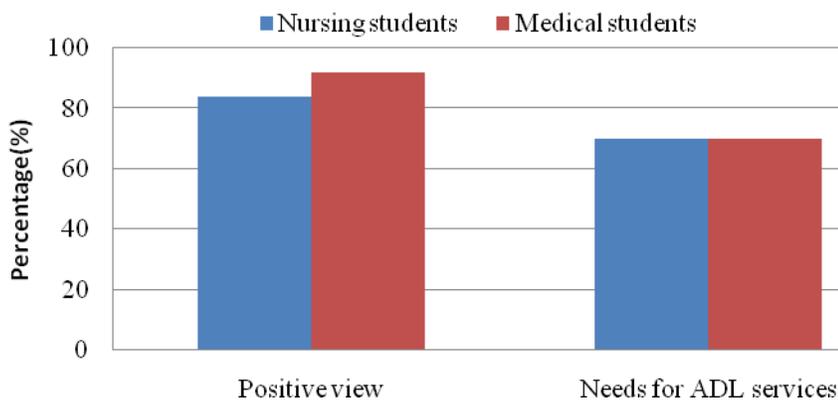
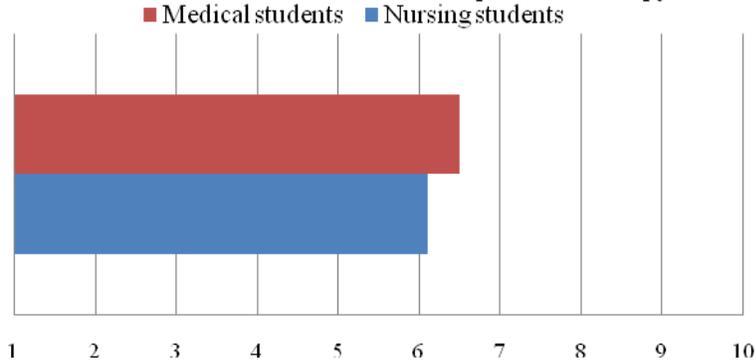


FIGURE 3. Satisfaction with occupational therapy service

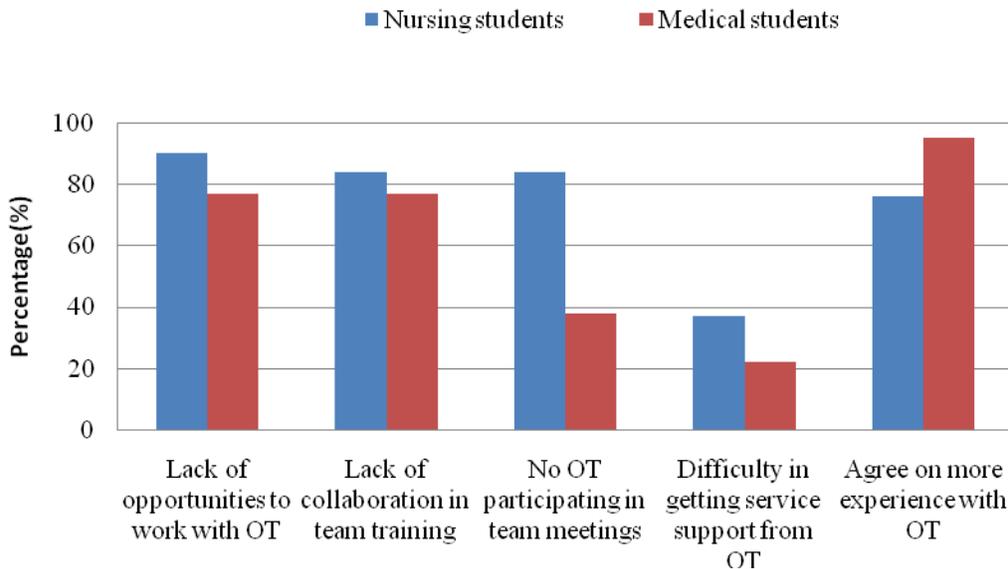


The current status of teamwork practice

Overall, there were 90% of nursing students and 77% of medical students admitted that they had few opportunities to work with occupational therapists in their fieldwork (FIGURE 4). Most of nursing students (84%) and medical students (77%) reported that they rarely collaborated with OT staff in team training for patient care. In addition, 84% nursing students and 38% medical students stated that there was no

occupational therapist participating in their medical team meetings. 37% nursing students and 22% medical students reported that they had difficulty in getting service support from occupational therapists when in need. Nevertheless, 76% nursing students and 95% medical students agreed that having more working experience with occupational therapists during their fieldwork would be helpful on improving future teamwork of patient care.

FIGURE 4- The current status of teamwork practice



Discussion

Role and function of occupational therapy

The results indicated that most nursing and medical students understood the major patient sources of occupational therapy were from PMR department and psychiatric department. This finding agreed with previous studies (Chou *et al.*, 2005; Hallin *et al.*, 2009). In some countries, there are many patients with various conditions in other departments such as neurology, orthopedic, neonatal intensive care unit, pediatric, and occupational medicine (Crepeau *et al.*, 2003). In Taiwan, however, these kinds of service provided by occupational therapists were not introduced to nursing and medical students. The data also showed that the students did not learn details of occupational therapy in fieldwork and they could not differentiate the difference between OT and PT, which were consistent with Chou's survey (Chou *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, teamwork education among professionals shall be emphasized and updated.

Nursing and medical students's perspectives on occupational therapy

The finding that evaluation and training in activities of daily living is the first priority of need for occupational therapy services was in accordance with previous study (Chou *et al.*, 2005). Such need for independent living training meets the spirits of International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health promoted by WHO (2001). Although the students showed high level of positive view on the important function of occupational therapy for the patients, they only expressed fair level of satisfaction with occupational therapy services suggesting that there is a great space of improvement for team education in Taiwan. It is therefore vital to enhance the knowledge and optimal

attitude among the practice of team professional.

The current status of teamwork practice

This survey showed that in fieldwork there was an apparent lack of opportunities to work and collaborate with occupational therapy in team training for both nursing and medical students. In team meetings with occupational therapists, medical students presented much more opportunities than nursing students. The discrepancy may attribute to the lack of arrangement in team education programme for nursing students. The nursing students should therefore be encouraged to participate in the related team meetings to improve the quality of patient care. Some students reported to have difficulty in getting service support from occupational therapists. This may infer inadequate manpower of occupational therapists in healthcare delivery system in Taiwan. An innovative education programme and legislation procedure may be necessary in the future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our findings indicated that a great proportion of nursing and medical students have less cognizance of role and function of occupational therapists and also few opportunities to collaborate with occupational therapists. However, they showed special needs from occupational therapy for patient care. Therefore, it is important to develop a clinical teamwork education programme to facilitate teamwork between occupational therapists and other medical professionals. It should be noted that the data in this study was based on the nursing and medical students from one single university and the results may or may not be generalized to nationwide nursing and medical students.

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