What is occupational therapy’s role in mental health practice and helping client’s return to work?

Unemployment is a challenge that many individuals with severe mental illness face. This CAT reviews if occupational therapy can play a meaningful role in helping clients with mental illness return to work.

1 Ask: Research Question
In individuals with serious mental illness, what is the effect of rehabilitation on return to work?

2a Acquire: Search Terms
Patient/Client group: Mental Health OR Mental Health Services OR Community Mental Health Services OR Community Mental Health Centers OR Mental Health Disorder
Intervention: Rehabilitation Program OR Supported Employment
Comparison:
Outcome(s): Return to Work

2b Acquire: Selected Articles
Burns et al. (2008): Randomized control trial (RCT) to examine the effectiveness of Individual Placement and Support (IPS) versus traditional vocational rehabilitation (TVR) for adults with SMI.
Tsang et al. (2009): Considered the effectiveness of Integrated Supported Employment (ISE), in comparison with IPS and TVR.
Gutman et al. (2009): Quasi-experimental study that investigated the effectiveness of supported education called The Bridge Program for adults with psychiatric disabilities.
Killackey et al. (2008): Randomized study that compared the effectiveness of IPS with treatment as usual in individuals with first time psychosis.

3a Appraise: Study Quality
Burns et al. (2008): Suggestive: Clear inclusion criteria and detailed amount of data analysis. Unclear description of treatment, no explanation of high dropout.
Tsang et al. (2009): Conclusive: Random participant allocation, similar baselines and follow-up times, large samples. Social skills assessment not validated, follow-up possibly too soon.
Gutman et al. (2009): Suggestive: Randomly allocated study, well-developed assessment tools. Small sample size, no dropout explanation, lack of reliability and validity data.
Killackey et al. (2008): Conclusive: Detailed description of rationale, blocked randomization implemented. Small sample size, 80% male, no cost-benefit analysis.

3b Appraise: Study Results
The results suggest that vocational intervention can help clients living with mental illness return to work. IPS and vocational rehabilitation programs create advantages for adults with SMI seeking re-entry into employment. Supported employment and social skills training are compatible and produce better outcomes when combined, as interpersonal skills must be addressed to ensure employment and job tenure. Psychiatric rehabilitation facilities can benefit from occupational therapy programs, and in the design process it is important to focus on functional and appropriate accommodations and explicit task analysis. Overall, those with SMI who are seeking employment would greatly benefit from vocational retraining and introduction programs.

4 Apply: Conclusions for Practice
Based on the results of these four strong research studies, this particular patient would benefit from a structured, organized return to work program implemented by an occupational therapist. Occupational therapy can play a meaningful role in psychiatric rehabilitation, including helping clients increase their independence by engaging in gainful employment.

References

Reviewers:
Mary Algiers, OTS; Celena Castillo, OTS; Lindsey Castro, OTS; Dolly Lee, OTS; Helen Miraai, OTS; and Vaishnavi Tallury, OTS.
Date completed: April 25, 2011

✓ Yes: Vocational intervention is effective in helping clients with serious mental illness return to work.