



WFOT

World Federation of Occupational Therapists

POSITION STATEMENT: Vocational rehabilitation

Introductory statement of purpose of paper

The purpose of this paper is to state the World Federation of Occupational Therapists' (WFOT) position on how Vocational Rehabilitation relates to occupational therapy's scope of practice.

In this statement vocational rehabilitation refers broadly to the provision of various services to assist people to enter, re-enter, return to and/or remain in work.¹

Around the world vocational rehabilitation is available to varying degrees and in various forms, for the public and private sectors and within non government organisations for people with and without a work history, and for employees and employers in diverse professional and non professional fields.

Statement of the position

Occupational therapists are recognised by industry and health care personnel as having a significant role to play in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.

Services provided in vocational rehabilitation depend on the needs and goals of the client, employer or insurer, and the environment in which the work takes place. Services include:

- evaluation such as pre-vocational and vocational assessment of the client and workplace
- intervention programs such as skill building, vocational training, work hardening and relevant workplace modification for clients who have not previously worked, or have an impairment that changes their work needs, and for clients who are entering, re-entering, returning to and/or remaining in work
- case management and counselling of clients/others
- health promotion programs to minimise risk of injury and create physical and social work environments that foster a culture of healthy work and healthy workplaces.

The WFOT affirms the right of people of all abilities to participate in productive occupations, including work² and affirms that occupational therapists have the expertise in vocational rehabilitation to enable individuals' participation in work.

Statement of the significance of the position to occupational therapy

It is a professional and ethical responsibility of occupational therapists to consider work-related issues for all individuals, including those in disadvantaged and marginalized groups and those with a short or long term impairment.³

Advocating for occupational justice and opportunities for productive roles in society for all is inherent in the vocational occupational therapy process.

Statement of the significance of the position to society

The WFOT's supports the recommendation from the World Health Organisation's Commission on the Social Determinants of Health, to "Improve the conditions of daily life – the circumstances in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age".⁴

The WFOT supports the International Labour Organization in promoting Decent Work for Persons with Disabilities based on the principles of equal opportunity, equal treatment, mainstreaming disability, and community involvement.⁵

Substantiating rationale for the position

Occupational therapists have expertise in vocational rehabilitation for the following reasons:

- A primary domain of concern with promoting performance of and engagement in occupations of all types, including work
- A focus on the performance skills, the contexts and environments influencing engagement, and the client's mental and physical health, body functions and structure
- Compatibility between the assessment of function and the demands of the work (i.e. activity analysis)
- A holistic approach to the needs of the client and employer.

Challenges and strategies

WFOT recognises the challenges within vocational rehabilitation including the following:

- Variation in the different understandings of the term vocational rehabilitation
- The determination of access to and prioritization of vocational rehabilitation
- Global, demographic and labour market changes.

The WFOT promotes the following strategies to address the above challenges:

- advocating the right of all people to participate in productive work
- promoting to the general public, employers and insurers the evaluation, intervention and preventive programs that are effective in enabling people to enter, re-enter, return to and/or remain in work
- undertaking and publishing further research that demonstrates the individual, community social and economic value of the provision of effective vocational rehabilitation services.

Conclusion

All people have a right to engage fully in their society including participation in productive work. The provision of vocational rehabilitation services can enable individuals to enter, re-enter, return to and or remain at work. Occupational therapists have expertise in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.

References

- ¹ Waddell, G., Burton, AK., Kendall, NAS. (2008) *Vocational Rehabilitation: What Works, for Whom, and When?* London: TSO.
- ² WFOT (2006) *Position Statement on Human Rights* http://www.wfot.org/office_files/Human%20Rights%20Position%20Statement%20Final%20NLH%281%29.pdf
- ³ WFOT (2005) *Code of Ethics*. http://www.wfot.org/office_files/WFOTCode%20of%20Ethics%202005.pdf
- ⁴ WHO (2008) *Social determinants of health*. www.who.int
- ⁵ ILO Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention (No. 159) and Recommendation (No. 168): United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities/International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2008.

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