

# SPECIAL PROJECTS IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

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One of the requirements of Occupational Therapy Diploma Courses held by the Institute of Health Care is the submission of a Special Project in the form of a comprehensive case study.

This is not entirely new practice in the OT educational field in Malta: students following early Department of Health courses were also required to produce a number of case histories from different clinical settings as well as a Log Book which recorded their clinical work.

The recent re introduction of Project Work in OT Courses motivates us to reflect on its undisputed validity and relevance to training.

## Rationale

An individual's potential cannot be solely gauged by his ability to reproduce text under examination conditions. Clinical placements, although effectively the most obvious means of bridging classwork with the clinical application, may be conditioned by a tendency of students to follow prevailing convention without proper understanding of actual treatment.

The special projects afford students the opportunity to produce their own work. It is the right medium to ascertain the level of assimilation, creativity and insight in relation to the whole therapeutic process.

It should also motivate students to initiate an objective validation and critique of treatment methodology with the attendant ap-

praisal of principles, procedures and the introduction of new techniques or activities.

All this should be ideally complimented by a literature search of wide scope which will broaden the student's vision, stimulating his interest and informing him of new possibilities of thinking and research.

## Implementation

Before a student can start work on a project he has to present a written proposal of his intended case to the Board of Studies who in turn will determine if this proposal is feasible.

When the student's proposal is approved by the Board he would be able to embark on the main body of his work which entails the assessment and treatment of the selected client.

Concurrently, the student will elaborate the documentation of his clinical intervention, linking it to a supportive conceptual framework of principles and theory related to the particular case selected.

A clinical supervisor is also assigned. His role is to guide the student in treatment programming and data collection. Later, the supervisor will contribute in the assessment of the project and the final marking. The Project is assessed through an Oral Presentation which will form a part of the Final Comprehensive Examination.

### Practical Considerations

Selecting clients and clinical supervisors for each student may have subjected OT departments, already quite under-staffed, to considerable strain.

The continuity of treatment as well as contact between students and clients may not have been ideal.

Personnel, both in the clinical as well as in the academic field could not have foreseen all the eventualities which this exercise has brought about.

However it can be confidently said that all parties involved have benefited in one way or another, and this initial effort has served as a good learning experience.

### Outcomes

A certain degree of bias could be noted both in the students' choice of cases and in the body of text they have produced.

A predominance of cases from the physical field with a predilection for neurology, particularly Stroke, was very evident. Generally students also tended to emphasise theory to the detriment of an in-depth consideration of the clinical aspects of their case.

With these outcomes in mind, the Board of Studies will be considering the amendment to the Project Guidelines to help direct students towards a more clinically orientated approach.