

Understanding and Improving Occupational Performance for Veterans with PTSD

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INTRODUCTION

Educational opportunities for occupational therapy practitioners about veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are sparse and the need for a self-directed, online educational course for occupational therapy practitioners directed towards veterans has been identified. Yeterian (2017) found that provision of occupational therapy services for veteran populations diagnosed with PTSD results in an improvement in overall occupational performance across the veterans lifespan. Specifically, Post-9/11 veterans are at a substantial disadvantage in terms of resilience, protective factors and have elevated vulnerability factors (Fang et al, 2015). This project sought to determine the effectiveness of an online continuing education course in improving the occupational therapy practitioners' integration of important constructs related to occupational engagement when working with veterans diagnosed with PTSD. Throughout the development of this project two needs were identified: The need for an accessible educational course for OT practitioners related to veterans with PTSD, and the need for improved intervention strategies for use with veterans with PTSD. The final online educational course will be provided through the AOTA CE Learn platform and available to members of AOTA.

METHODS

This evidence-based project was undertaken as part of a doctoral capstone project. A pilot of the developed online educational course, 'Understanding and Improving Occupational Performance of Veterans with PTSD utilizing the Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement (CMOP-E),' was conducted with six occupational therapists and one occupational therapy assistants to determine the overall effectiveness of the course. A voice-over PowerPoint lecture and interactive learning activities, pre/post-test, occupational profile, case study and satisfaction survey were developed. Participants were engaged throughout the course by use of visual and auditory stimuli. Learner knowledge and satisfaction were also assessed according to the Kirkpatrick Model which is a model used for analyzing and evaluating the results of training and educational programs (Kirkpatrick, 1994).

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Apply the Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement model when working with veterans with PTSD
- Explain administration and scoring of the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure ("COPM", 2018)
- Discuss barriers to effective intervention for veterans with PTSD
- Explain client factors that limit engagement in meaningful occupations for veterans with PTSD
- Summarize the distinct value of occupational therapy and the implications for occupational therapy practitioners when treating veterans with PTSD

COURSE CONTENT

Veterans

- 11-20 of every 100 veterans who served in Operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Enduring Freedom (OEF) have PTSD in a given year (National Center for PTSD, 2018).
- Untreated psychiatric conditions of veterans lead to: lost work productivity, relationship dysfunction, increased risk for substance use, and suicide (Tanielian et al., 2008).
- Occupational performance challenges of veterans: driving, productivity, physical health, relationship issues, and sleep disturbances (Plach & Sells, 2013).

PTSD

- Post-traumatic stress disorder from warzone exposure is associated with chronic and disabling social and occupational problems and functional impairment.
- Rarely assessed or targeted directly in PTSD treatments, which instead focus on symptom reduction (Eakman, 2015).

Occupational therapy

- Brings a habilitation perspective to mental health services in keeping with increased emphasis on recovery and functionality directed toward participation in daily life occupations.

Professional Barriers

- Less occupational therapists available at VA facilities; veterans do not have optimal access to services for their post-traumatic stress disorder (Baum, 2008).

Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement

- Conceptual occupational performance model.
- Polatajko et al. (2007) states that occupational performance is a 'dynamic interaction of the person, occupation and environment' and enablement through occupation is described as 'enabling people to choose, organize and perform those occupations they find useful and meaningful in their environment' (Polatajko et al., 2007) .

Canadian Occupational Performance Measure-COPM

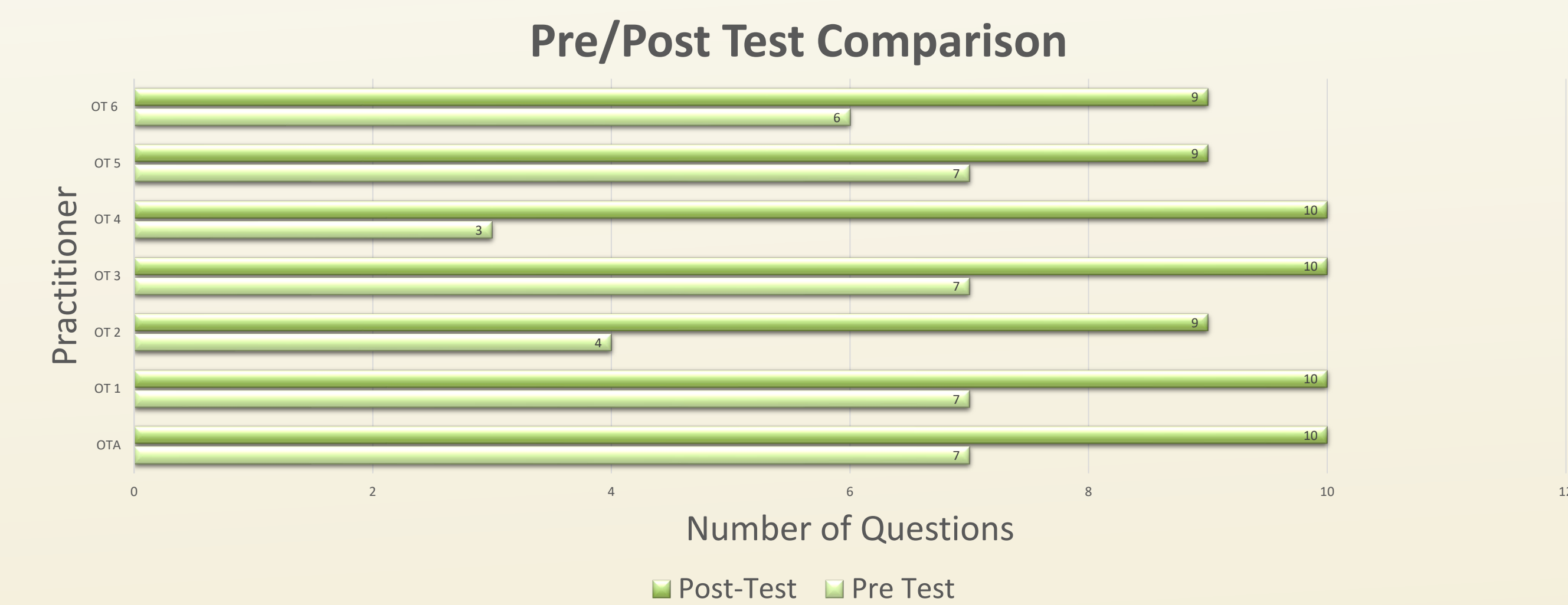
- Assess client outcomes in the areas of self-care, productivity and leisure
- Client-centered tool to enable individuals to identify and prioritize everyday issues that restrict or impact their performance in everyday living.

Distinct Value

- Occupational therapy interventions for both preventive and mental health care in veterans diagnosed with PTSD could be of significant benefit to servicemembers, veterans, and their families.

RESULTS

Figure 1: Bar Graph Comparing Pre- and Post-test scores for Participants



Data analysis of the pre- and post-test was completed utilizing a paired *t*-test to compare knowledge from pre- to post-course completion. A difference score was also calculated. Seven occupational therapy practitioners completed the pilot educational course and the *p* value was found to be 0.0011 indicating a statistically significant change in knowledge from pre- to post-test.

CONCLUSION

In providing an online continuing education module to occupational therapy practitioners utilizing the Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement and Canadian Occupational Performance Measure for veterans diagnosed with PTSD, engagement in meaningful activities and occupational performance of the veteran will improve. A self-directed online training course pilot improved the knowledge of occupational therapy practitioners about veterans with PTSD by offering an ecologically sound evaluation and assessment for experiences that are uniquely impactful for war veterans. Occupational therapy practitioners can use the CMOP-E as an overarching conceptual model in combination with COPM to provide client centered and targeted interventions to improve the veteran with PTSD's engagement in meaningful activities and occupational performance helping to improve their overall quality of life and reintegration.

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