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The Work of Occupational Therapists in Prescribing Assistive Technology Devices (ATDs) for Older Adults: A Collective Case Study

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Introduction: Assistive technology devices (ATDs) are prescribed by occupational therapists to enhance the occupational performance of older adults. The non-use of prescribed ATDs has been reported, representing a major problem for ATD provision schemes like the Program of Appliances for Disabled People (PADP). In a PADP review, the lack of expertise amongst occupational therapists was suggested as a reason for non-use of ATDs, highlighting a professional issue which demands further exploration. This study aimed to address this issue by exploring the work process adopted by occupational therapists in prescribing ATDs for older adults through the PADP scheme.

Methods: This qualitative collective case study design recruited occupational therapists through emails to regional occupational therapy advisors. Participants were occupational therapists who provided occupational therapy services in the Sydney metropolitan region and who were involved in assessment and prescription of ATDs using the PADP scheme. Single individual in-depth interviews were conducted with the occupational therapists. The interviews were transcribed, peer reviewed and member-checked by participants. Thematic analysis was used to analyse interview data.

Results: The work process of occupational therapists prescribing ATDs for older adults using the PADP scheme will be reported. Steps undertaken by occupational therapists in ATD prescription and their clinical reasoning decisions will be highlighted, including how the ATD was selected and how prescription was followed-up.

Conclusions: Findings will aid in understanding the work of occupational therapists in prescribing ATDs. Areas of evidence-based practice will be highlighted, together with potential areas for improvement to decrease the non-use of ATDs by clients. Recommendations concerning occupational therapists' training and education programs will be made, relevant to the PADP advisory board, the occupational therapy association and educators. Clinicians may also utilize results as a means of reflection on current practice.