

Guest Editorial

Work Occupations and Outcomes Internationally and Across the Lifespan

Glenn Goodman

*Health Sciences Department HS 103, Cleveland State University, 2121 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115, USA
Tel.: +1 216 687 2493; Fax: +1 216 687 9316; E-mail: g.goodman@csuohio.edu*

This special issue was made possible by a visit from Karen Jacobs (Editor of *Work*) to the Cleveland State University Campus in September 2002. Karen asked us what we were doing in the area of work, and she was excited about the variety of interests among the Cleveland State Faculty in the Health Sciences Department. She asked us to share our work using this forum.

In deciding what to share, four areas of expertise came to mind. Cleveland State's Occupational Therapy Program has been active for over 10 years in International Programs in Belize and Guatemala. Bette Bonder's article on work among Maya women in Guatemala and Susan Bazyk's article looking at work among children and youth both address work outside the United States. It is important to understand how other cultures view work to improve practice in the United States and to develop new areas of practice internationally [3].

A second area of expertise is program evaluation. The literature suggests the need for accountability in return to work and other rehabilitation programs [1,2,4]. Two traditional work hardening programs were evaluated in articles by Patrick Baker and Glenn Goodman. Brenda Greene's and Glenn Goodman's articles look at the effectiveness of ergonomics programs. Sharon Flinn studied a successful return to work program for veterans with mental illness.

A third area of expertise is occupation across the lifespan. Susan Bazyk and Patricia Bambrick address work issues from a developmental perspective, examining work among children and youth as well as the meaning of work among older adults. Mary Milidonis examined work status among individuals with arthritis using epidemiological methods.

The fourth area of expertise covered in this issue comes from the biomechanics frame of reference. This article, written by Jamie Landis, looks at the effect of various forms of therapeutic exercise to individual muscle activity in lateral epicondylitis.

Although most of the articles came from research generated at Cleveland State University, two articles were supplied by individuals not directly affiliated with the University. Brenda L. Greene, PT, PhD, OCS, from Emory University shared her work with computer ergonomics programs and collaborated with Dr. Milidonis on the epidemiological study of work and arthritis. Sharon Flinn from Functional Visions looked at return to work among veterans with mental illness living in a rural group home setting.

It is very gratifying to showcase work of our students. The following Cleveland State University Occupational Therapy Program students collaborated with faculty to produce research found in this issue: Margaret Browning, Sims Campbell, Huison Hudak, Sheila McGuire, Crystal Shorter, Michelle Sieminski, and Tamika Wilson. Inna Keselman, MPT, OTR/L and Catherine Murphy, MPT, OTR/L collaborated with Dr. Landis as part of their Master of Physical Therapy education. Other authors who are working professionally elsewhere, but who completed these articles while working on their advanced Masters degrees at Cleveland State, include Patrick Baker, MS, OTR/L, Patricia Bambrick, MS, RN, Bridget Reilly, OTR/L, and Janice Toyota, OTR/L.

Some of the most pertinent findings in this issue are listed below:

1. "Cultural change is both positive and negative, as described by Mayan women of Guatemala. It

is important to understand the particular values of a culture, and to recognize that these may not conform to Western (that is to say US) beliefs and practices” (Bonder, Bazyk, Reilly and Toyota).

2. “A number of key factors associated with the successful transition to adult work include social origin, time orientation, parental influence, work experience, and participation in structured leisure pursuits” (Bazyk).
3. A statistically significant negative correlation between pain and physical performance and a positive correlation between pain and depression were found in clients completing a work hardening program. Diagnosis, level of education, gender, and pre-injury work were found to be significant predictors of improvements made during the program (Baker, Goodman, Ekelman and Bonder).
4. Suggestions for improvements in work programs include an increase in use of real and simulated work activities, better documentation of pain measures, better programs to address psychosocial issues, lengthening the time clients are in the programs, and increased communication with case managers and professionals outside of the programs (Goodman, Browning, Campbell and Hudak).
5. “Participative training in workstation ergonomics can improve work postures, work practices, risk factor exposure, and pain” (Greene, DeJoy, and Olejnik).
6. “Successful implementation of ergonomics programs depends upon effective communication and education of consumers, and the support, cooperation, and collaboration of management and employees.” (Goodman, Landis, George, McGuire, Shorter, Sieminski and Wilson).
7. Residents in a group home for Veterans with mental illness who returned to work “expressed an initial desire to be employed and were more likely to participate in performance-based activities than residents who were not working. The skills and barriers to employment were different for each person due to different interests, skills, and motivations. Likewise, their experiences of finding and attempting to maintain employment differed, both because of their personal attributes and because of situational factors. This suggests the need for individualized vocational rehabilitation programs” (Flinn, Ventura, Bonder)
8. “Younger disabled persons with arthritis, who have little difficulty lifting 10 pounds, and have some college education have better odds of working. Occupational health professionals need to look for ways to improve the educational status and functional lifting ability of disabled individuals with arthritis” (Milidonis and Greene).
9. Because productive activity has been linked to successful aging, it is important to understand how elders perceive work. In a study of mostly female community residing elderly adults, “three themes emerged as describing their attributions of meaning or importance to productive activities: contribution to self-concept, giving back to community, and staying engaged. Findings suggest that the productive activities of older adults contribute to quality of life for them and have implications for society as well” (Bambrick and Bonder).
10. In comparing EMG findings for a variety of exercises, relative activity was noted to be greatest for extensor digitorum and flexor carpi radialis during a make it disappear sponge exercise, and for extensor carpi radialis brevis during putty exercises. Different exercises represented different patterns of muscle activity. The possible differences in the recorded activity may be consequent to the specific positioning and movement requirements involved in the performance of the distinct exercises. Practitioners may find the evidence of this study helpful in designing rehabilitation programs for those affected with lateral epicondylitis (Landis, Keselman and Murphy).

It is our hope that you enjoy this special issue that reflects our efforts to study the effectiveness of work related programs, to provide a theoretical approach to work across the lifespan and across the world, and to share efforts in basic science to study the effectiveness of exercise as it relates to work hardening and work conditioning programs.

References

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