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Developing contemporary occupational therapy educational programs

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The paper will overview:

- occupational therapy education in Australia
- the course accreditation process used by the professional association
- strategies being used to prepare graduates for current practice, and
- highlight a few key challenges



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- 20 million people
- 70 per cent of the population live in the 10 largest cities
- Most people live along the eastern seaboard and the south-eastern corner of the continent
- (one of the lowest rainfalls in the world and about three-quarters is arid or semi-arid).



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Development of the profession



- First Australian graduate in 1942
- Early alliance with physiotherapy (joint courses) then differentiation
- OT practice evolved and followed the shifts in health
- Institutional focus until mid 1970's
- Significant diversification of practice in the last 30 years
- Few occupational therapy assistant positions

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OT in Australia

- Working with, for and on behalf of individuals, groups, communities and populations of people of all ages
- (CAOT, 2002; Townsend & Polatajko, 2007).



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Occupational therapy practice areas

- Primary, secondary, tertiary health services (hospitals, community centres, rehabilitation services, outreach teams)
- Disability services
- Education
- Industry (occupational rehabilitation, occupational health and safety)
- Public sector and private practice



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Occupational therapy practice areas

With a range of job titles:

- Case manager (especially in occupational rehabilitation & mental health)
- Project worker (especially in the community)
- Community worker (especially in the non-government sector)
- Researcher
- Professional officer
- Occupational therapist

Occupational therapy education in Australia

- 13 universities providing occupational therapy
- About 800 commencing students each year nationally
- All current courses are either 4 or 5 years, Bachelor or Masters entry level



entry-level occupational therapy qualifications

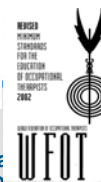
- Diploma
- Bachelor degree
- Bachelor (Honours)
- Masters
- Masters (Honours)
- Bachelor-Masters
- Doctorate

With some variations

- In length
- Mode of delivery
- (but little integration with the workplace)



Occupational therapy competency standards



1. Professional attitudes and behaviours
2. Assessment and interpretation of occupational roles, performance and functional level of individuals and groups
3. Implementation of individual and group interventions
4. Evaluation of occupational therapy programs
5. Documentation and dissemination of professional information
6. Professional education
7. Management of occupational therapy practice

Bachelor of Occupational Therapy at Monash

- 4 year full time undergraduate degree
- Honours program
- Intake of 60 students per year
- Approximately 18-20 contact hours per week plus fieldwork placements each year
- Health promotion and community capacity building focus



Curriculum themes

- Theme 1: Personal and Professional Development
- Theme 2: Population, Society and Health
- Theme 3: Fundamental Knowledge for the Health Sciences
- Theme 4: Applied Practice
- Theme 5: Research

Curriculum themes

- Theme 1: including communication, inter-professional teamwork, ethics, professionalism
- Theme 2: including health trends, health promotion, political and sociological issues
- Theme 3: including anatomy, psychology, occupational science & theory, OT process
- Theme 4: fieldwork in rural, metropolitan, locations, hospital and community
- Theme 5: accessing & critiquing evidence

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Shift in health and human services

- Promoting good health and wellbeing and preventing health and social problems
- Creating inclusive, enabling environments



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Participatory Community Practice

- Third year: Development**
Work within a health promotion model, collaborate with agency members to "scope" an organizationally useful, and occupationally relevant project.



- Fourth year: Implementation**
Act as project manager and collaborate with stakeholders to implement, evaluate and report on the project

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Project example ENSURING ACCESS FOR ALL

- Project sponsoring agency**
 - Frankston City Council
- Project summary**
 - To increase awareness amongst Council workers and the general public about access issues
- Project output**
 - Professional education (forum and guide)
 - Consumer information
- Health promotion action area**
 - Supportive environments
 - Community action
- Enabling occupation focus**
 - Occupational justice
 - Occupational deprivation

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The challenge of preparing graduates for diverse practice areas



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The challenge of meeting the needs of the community

- Despite a 'small' population and a well established public and private system, we have many areas of unmet need
- National and international shortage of health practitioners
- Our current education strategies cannot meet the need

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- Health services and Universities are mostly located in the larger cities
- People in rural and remote locations are poorly serviced
- Difficult to attract health practitioners to work in rural and remote locations
- High attrition rate of staff
- Long and costly pathway to practice



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AUSTRALIA

2020

Australia's Health Workforce



- Completely reshape the health workforce
- Less hierarchy, more collaboration, integrated, flexible, cooperative
- Best provider provides the support needed at lowest cost

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future workforce and implications for education

- Interdisciplinary practice
- Multi-skilled, generic practitioners
- Shortened courses for professionals to acquire skills beyond their normal range
- Modular and multiple pathways for developing health professionals
- Role substitution

(Duckett, 2005, 2008)



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