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Missing Pieces and Misconceptions: Public Understanding of Occupational Therapy

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**Missing Pieces and Misconceptions: Public Understanding of Occupational Therapy**

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**Background**
- Occupational therapy (OT) is now 100 years old but still not well known or understood (Mason & Mathieson, 2018).
- Term "occupation" not clear to the public (Howarth, Morris, & Cox, 2016; Royeen, 2003).
- Misconceptions result in role confusion for healthcare team & lack of utilization or funding (Binzer, 2016; Lucas Molitor, & Mayou, 2018; Mason & Mathieson, 2018).
- OT also not highly visible in media.
- OTs 'help' or 'retrain' so what plan for the Gamma Nu Chapter of Pi Theta to create an OT YouTube channel highlighting the full scope of occupational therapy as their ongoing scholarly project.

**Methods**
- Qualitative project
  - Eight MSOT students from the Pi Theta Honor Society completed 37 interviews with individuals considered "the general public" as part of their scholarly project.
  - Inclusion criteria:
    - An adult at least 18 y.o. who is English speaking
    - Has not had OT services him or herself
    - Is not a family member of an OT or OTS
    - Does not work in the healthcare field or is currently studying a healthcare profession at a college/university.
  - Interviews were transcribed verbatim
  - Analysis with line by line coding and creation of code list
  - Themes extracted and quote counts completed
  - Two additional individuals established inter-rater reliability

**Results**
- Two major themes were Missing Pieces and Misconceptions:

  - Missions Pieces = statements about OT that were correct but narrow in scope (narrow) or indicated lack of knowledge (I don’t know).
  - Misconceptions = statements that were incorrect (misinformed).
  - Statements that were correct and appropriate are called "spot on." (5 of 6) were from people who knew someone who had OT or someone who was an OT.

**Discussion**
- Findings suggest that similar to studies of other health professionals or students (Connor-Kerr, Wittman & Muzzarelli, 1998; Lucas Molitor & Mayou, 2016; Pottebaum & Svinarich, 2006), the general public demonstrates confusion and misinformation about OT.
- Need for public awareness campaign "to create accurate and powerful images of the distinct value of the occupational therapy profession" (Walsh, 2018).
- Plan for the Gamma Nu Chapter of Pi Theta to create an OT YouTube channel highlighting the full scope of occupational therapy as their ongoing scholarly project.

**Sample size**
- 37 people (80% of participants were 29 y.o. who is English speaking). of convenience
- Sample: Studies completed 37 interviews with individuals considered “the general public” as part of their scholarly project.
- Narrow = 14 / 37
- I don’t know = 8 / 37
- Misinformed = 9 / 37
- Spot on = 6 / 37

**Common ideas about OT**
- OTs ‘help’ or ‘retrain’ so people can ‘get back to’
- OT compared to PT
- Related to jobs
- Related to self care
- Related to injury
- ‘I have no idea’

**Research Questions**
- How does the general public define occupational therapy?
- What are the common misconceptions about occupational therapy?