

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, the Western Cape Education Department appoints occupational therapists as education therapists at various schools and resource centres for learners with special educational needs (LSEN).

The role of the education therapist in public schools is to ensure that the education of learners is promoted through engaging the learner with special needs in therapy, including the academic, educational and disciplinary aspects and to organise extra-curricular and co-curricular activities⁵.

One of the core duties and responsibilities of an education therapist is to plan, co-ordinate, control, administer, evaluate and report on the learner's developmental progress on an ongoing basis. Education therapists are also required to review and record progress and make necessary changes to the intervention strategies. They must develop, record, monitor and evaluate home programs to support a carry-over of skills learnt in therapy to the home.

The education therapists are required to keep detailed records on each learner managed at the LSEN School, as well as on learners attending occupational therapy from surrounding mainstream schools. These records include background information, assessment records, long term planning, short term planning, session evaluations, individual educational development plans (IEDP's), regular written reports to parents, case discussions, correspondence with care-givers.

The purpose of these records is to provide a chronological profile of the learner's condition, detailing the therapeutic intervention, facilitating communication among professionals who contribute to the learner's care, providing an objective basis to determine the appropriateness, effectiveness and necessity of therapeutic intervention.

The education therapist is required to periodically reflect on, critically analyse and summarise the data collected⁶.

The standard of record keeping has received little attention in terms of research in occupational therapy, yet records form the basis of each occupational therapist's assessment and treatment plan⁶. Good quality record keeping is critical in guiding practice and providing information for members of the support services⁶.

This research report aims to assess the quality of clinical occupational therapy records kept at LSEN Schools in the Western Cape. LSEN Schools are schools for learners with special educational needs. These schools were previously known as "Special Schools" and in the future most of these schools will be converted to "Resource Centres" in accordance with White Paper 6¹.

In order to determine the quality of the clinical occupational therapy records kept at LSEN Schools it is necessary to determine the standards of practice through a literature review. Standards of practice are an important baseline for quality activities. These standards should reflect known good or best practice²⁰. The quality of the records kept is determined by the comprehensiveness of the records in comparison to the standards of practice.

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The requirements for occupational therapy records by the Department of Education are vague and unspecific. There are no established guidelines or gold standard against which the quality of records can be evaluated. Educational therapists have increasing workloads resulting in them questioning which records are required as recording detailed information is labour intensive and time consuming.

1.3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study, through the use of literature, aims to develop a checklist to evaluate and audit clinical occupational therapy records. The type and quality of clinical records kept by occupational therapists at LSEN schools are to be determined using the checklist as well as which records occupational therapists think are important to keep in view of their clinical intervention and whether they know what records they are required to keep.

The main purpose of the study is to develop a checklist that can be used to ensure that in the future record keeping requirements are appropriate in terms of the job description of education therapists in LSEN schools and it can be used as a guideline to monitor and maintain the quality of these records.

1.4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to: -

- Develop a checklist to determine the quality of the clinical records kept by occupational therapists in LSEN Schools.
- Assess which clinical occupational therapy records are currently being kept at LSEN schools and how these records are stored.
- Audit these records using the checklist.
- Make recommendations with regards to required record keeping in the job descriptions of education therapists working in LSEN schools.
- Make recommendations as to the quality assurance of these clinical records.

1.5. JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

The Western Cape Education Department established a task team to develop job descriptions for education therapists in accordance with White Paper 6. The first draft of the job descriptions was completed in April 2003⁵.

The type of clinical records that are kept by occupational therapists at LSEN schools are identified and their quality is determined. The researcher also determines what records the occupational therapists feel are important to keep. Suggestions are made regarding the administrative requirements, in terms of record keeping, to be included in the job description of education therapists as well as setting standards for quality assurance.

1.6. ASSUMPTIONS MADE OF THE STUDY

Before the study commenced the researcher assumed that:

- The information kept in the learner's files will be similar in most schools.
- Occupational therapists, through their university education, understand the importance to maintain certain records.
- Occupational therapists vary in their opinion on the focus of record keeping.

During the data collection the researcher found that the following assumptions had also been made, which could possibly affect the research results:

- Occupational therapists maintain records for all the learners in the school.
- Occupational therapists maintain records exclusively in the occupational therapy departments and not combined records with other team members.
- Occupational therapists provide direct intervention to learners.