

Development of a clinical community classroom for occupational therapy students

Submitted by:

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Collaborators:

Practicing non-government organisations (NGO) and experienced health care providers

Funding requested : **for 3 years (Jan, 2011 to Dec, 2013)**

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Background

Our university is dedicated to the provision of holistic and quality education with the aim to educate students to become all-round competent professionals and responsible individuals to the society (PolyU QAC report, 2010). In addition to providing professionally-oriented education, it is important to strengthen the holistic development of students in the area of global outlook, problem solving, critical and creative thinking, communication skills, and sense of social and national responsibility, lifelong learning, teamwork and leadership. In our Department of Rehabilitation Sciences (RS), we are committed to provide education programme which is outcome-based OBE), work-integrated, professionally and globally-oriented, and student centred.

The traditional clinical placements for occupational therapy students are often conducted in hospital settings where the clinical educators are senior therapists employed by Hospital Authority. They have a conventional mode of training which focuses more on service delivery rather than students' learning. Under the new health care reform, rehabilitation services should be moving from hospital based practice to community integrative practice. Prevention, health care promotion and education, will form a vital part of rehabilitation services in Hong Kong. Rehabilitation professionals should be ready to develop innovative programme to enhance quality of life of persons with chronic illnesses.

An innovative and comprehensive learning experience would need to be planned for our students such that they can learn the professional techniques and strengthen their generic competency as stated above. New types of clinical learning environment and new teaching learning strategies for students should be established in order to prepare them to meet with new challenges and develop their generic skills in communication, teamwork, leadership, problem solving and national responsibility.

A recently local study has presented positive effect on students' learning through an emerging clinical education programme other than the conventional hospital typed clinical placement (Li-Tsang, Choi, Sinclair & Wong, 2009). The study aimed to evaluate the learning process of students being placed in an emerging clinical environment where the Occupational therapy services were yet to develop. Students have to explore opportunities for service development and promotion, prepare

intervention strategies, and formulate outcome measures at a local community setting. Results indicated positive learning outcomes among the students who were placed in this new setting when compared to the conventional clinical settings in hospitals. Their problem solving skills, teamwork, communication skills were found to be improved after the clinical programme.

Similar learning experiences were found effective at the Deyang Rehabilitation Center in Sichuan (Appendix I). The emerging clinical classroom was established soon after the 512 wenchuan earthquake in Sichuan in 2008. The classroom was established with the support from Hong Kong Red Cross and students from Hong Kong and mainland came to learn the clinical skills in occupational therapy. At the same time, they would have to accommodate the cultural, political and environmental challenges at the center which were totally different from the conventional hospital type's clinical settings. Students, though found it very challenging and difficult at times, reported better outcomes in their problem solving skills, analytical skills, and communication and team management skills. Similar experiences were also reported from a few local clinical community services programme. (appendix II).

The purpose of this project is to further expand this concept of emerging clinical teaching environment to some local community settings organised by non-government agencies (NGO) in Hong Kong. In order to equip our students with the professional and generic skills to cope with the future challenges ahead, it is essential to create learning environment that could enhance both the professional competency and their all round abilities. It is therefore important to establish the clinical community classroom that would enhance the integration of theory and practice.

Objectives of the study

The aim of this project is to enhance students' learning through the establishment of emerging clinical classrooms where clinical OT services are still not formally established. There are three main objectives in this project:

- To enhance students' learning of professional skills through interacting with real clients and in the community settings;
- To enrich students with the opportunities to develop their generic skills in communication, global outlook, teamwork, leadership and problem solving abilities; and
- To promote community awareness on the concept of health and promotion of health through the establishment of the clinical community classroom.

Proposed methodology

1. Establishment of the community classroom

Two local NGOs are identified as collaborative partners for this project. One of them is a community rehabilitation organisation for children while another setting is for adults with disabilities.

The Chief Executives of the two settings will be approached for a more formal collaboration through setting up MOU. The collaboration will include the formal establishment of the clinical community classroom.

Once the formal agreement is established, then the research team will begin to prepare the collaboration with target rehabilitation organizations to establish the clinical community classrooms.

2. Establishment of clinical teaching team

Two half time clinical associates will be jointly employed between these two clinical settings to set up the training programme for students. They must be qualified occupational therapists with extensive experiences in clinical and educational skills. They will be the clinical educators who will provide coaching to the students. At the same time, they will act as the clinical associates in our programme such that they will be better integrated into our OBE model of education.

3. Development of e-platform for teaching and learning

The physical layout of the clinical classroom will be set up and the e-learning platform will be created at the local community centers. Trial run of the clinical classroom will be conducted for the 1st batch of students of the new 334 curriculum.

Client interviews, orientation of the clinical community setting could be reinforced through the e-mode of teaching and learning.

4. Voluntary services at the center

During the summer term of the first and second year, students will then be placed at the classroom to be a volunteer. They will assist in any activities launched at the center and this will reinforce their abilities in communication, teamwork, social and national responsibility etc.

5. Development of the emerging clinical community classroom with case management

At the year III of their study, more formal clinical attachment would be planned for students. They would have to develop more innovative training programme for specific group of clients at the community classroom. Students will take the lead instead of the direct supervision from the clinical educators. This will be reinforced at their year IV of study until they graduate. The whole programme will be evaluated through various outcome measures.

Schedule of work

Programme	Time period
Liaison and network with 1-2 local NGO sectors a. Heep Hong Society, Hong Kong b. Wai Ji Christian Services, Hong Kong	Jan, 2011 to August, 2011
Set up the clinical classrooms at the settings a. Establishment of the e-case learning platform for the two clinical settings b. Build up physical environment for clinical classroom c. Employment of Full time clinical educator	September, 2011 to August, 2012
Orientation of year I students (new 334 curriculum) a. E-learning platform to familiarise the local community settings, the NGO settings b. Patient interviews via e-mode (teleconferencing)	September, 2011 to December, 2011 Year 1 Winter term
Attachment to the NGOs a. Preparation of the generic health care programme b. Individual case management (under supervision of Clinical associate)	January, 2012 to August, 2012 Year 2 Summer term
Full establishment of clinical community classrooms a. Direct case management b. Development of new programmes	September, 2012 to July, 2013 Year 3 whole year
Evaluation and review a. Focus group interview for students b. OBE review (Programme LOAP) c. Students' SFQ d. CAs' reflection e. NGO (employers) review	August, 2013 to December, 2013.

Duration of the project:

January, 2011 to December, 2013

Budget

Plan of Evaluation

A part time PhD student will be employed to plan for the evaluation of the whole project. Initial assessment of students' learning profile will be measured before their engagement into the clinical community classroom.

Outcomes of the study will be assessed as follows:

- a. Students' learning outcomes through the programme LOAP
- b. Students' feedback questionnaire (SFQ) on the programme (not on the subject)
- c. SAARD to assess students' generic profile (pre- and post- intervention)
- d. Focus group interviews on students
- e. Self reflection of clinical teachers
- f. Employers' feedback

References

Li-Tsang, C.W.P., Choi, P.K.K., Sinclair, K. & Wong, R.S.M. (2009). An explorative study of an emerging practice clinical education programme for occupational therapy students. *Hong Kong Journal of Occupational Therapy*. 19(2): 44-49.

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Appendix I

Fig. 1 Emerging clinical education centre in Deyang, Sichuan



Fig. 2 Clinical educator training OT students on patient management



Appendix II

Fig. 1 Community educational services for patients with arthritis



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Fig. 2 Community services project developed by OT student in collaboration with Fu Hong Society

