Abstract

Occupational therapy practitioners have remained diligent in their endeavors to sustain their profession, at times by reinventing their practice. Maintaining their professional guidelines and ethics all the while has been a constant. As the health care debate continues, occupational therapy, as a profession, has embraced the adoption of evidenced-based practice as a profession-wide goal. As chronic illness and disease grow in the United States, the profession must adjust its focus to care for those who would stand to benefit from individual or population-based occupational therapy treatments. One such chronic disease multiplying in prevalence is Type 2 diabetes. Occupational therapy interventions can integrate diabetes management into patients’ lifestyles, while including context and culture in treatment planning and design. In the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV), the population is made up primarily of Hispanics, making a culturally sensitive approach to diabetes program implementation important for the region. The occupational therapy practice framework incorporates the creation and promotion of health and prevention of barriers to occupational performance. Occupational therapy professionals, as a qualified, available and suitable resource for treating the diabetic population of the LRGV, have been untapped for the most part in the region.
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Introduction

The field of occupational therapy practice is an allied health profession that has the ability to change with the times. Despite ever changing regulations in Medicare funding and Medicaid funding, occupational therapy practitioners have remained diligent in their endeavors to sustain their profession by reinventing their practice, while maintaining their guidelines and ethics. As the health care debate continues, occupational therapy, as a profession, has embraced the adoption of evidenced-based practice as a practice wide goal. It is imperative that occupational therapists strive to set standards of practice to maintain professional integrity.

As chronic illnesses and disease grows in the United States, the profession must again change its focus to care for those individuals who would stand to benefit from individual or population-based occupational therapy treatments. One such chronic disease multiplying its prevalence is Type 2 diabetes. In the U.S., two thirds of the population is considered overweight or obese, a risk factor for Type 2 diabetes. 24 million Americans have developed Type 2 diabetes, as of 2007, according to the CDC (1). The 2007 National Diabetes Fact Sheet states that 10.4% of Hispanics aged 20 years or older have diabetes, and among those, 11.9% of Mexican Americans have diabetes (2). The rate of incidence is said to continue to climb; 1.6 million new cases of diabetes are diagnosed every year for this adult population (2).

The Case for Occupational Therapy as a Qualified Diabetes Provider

Occupational therapists are well equipped to treat patients with this type of diabetes, and various interventions are being provided to patients on an individual and small group basis. Most patients in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) who have solely diabetes as their primary complaint or diagnosis are not referred for occupational therapy evaluation and treatment. Rather patients with a medical diagnosis of hip fracture, cerebral vascular accident, brain injury, neurological disorders or otherwise are referred to occupational therapy and may have a secondary diagnosis of Type 2 diabetes. Occupational therapy in this geographical area is primarily a rehabilitative or tertiary prevention profession.

Because occupational therapy concerns itself with improving patient performance in activities of daily living toward the goal of independence, as well as in improving quality of life, patients with diabetes could benefit greatly from occupational therapy intervention. Hwang et al. found that older adults with diabetes were mostly concerned with cholesterol control, management of blood sugar, pain reduction and management, fatigue management and foot care (3). This finding suggested that occupational therapy interventions need to integrate diabetes management into patients’ lifestyles. Moreover, occupational therapists also take context and
culture into consideration when devising a treatment plan for their patients. In the LRGV, the population is made up primarily of Hispanics. A culturally sensitive approach to diabetes program implementation would be most effective in this particular area. Some in the culture believe that diabetes is caused by “susto,” or strong emotions; different types of treatments or remedies for diabetes, such as herbs, are also used within this culture (4).

Research has found that the utilization of support groups in culturally competent, diabetic self-management education interventions serves to increase the sustainability of positive health beliefs (5). A University of Southern California-based program, the Lifestyle Redesign Diabetes Program, uses the expertise of occupational therapists to address healthy eating, stress management, meaningful activity engagement, exercise and physical activity, and psychosocial issues related to healthy habit formation, among other areas, to improve self-management of diabetes (6). In addition to individual treatment sessions, this program utilizes group sessions that offer the social support needed to sustain the acceptance of novel diabetic education. When an occupational therapy intervention plan is developed, a theory based approach is used to select various approaches for the direct intervention, including but not limited to the creation or promotion of health and prevention of occurrence of barriers to occupational performance (7). This basis supports that occupational therapy professionals are a qualified, available and suitable resource for treating the diabetic population of the LRGV that, for the most part, has been untapped in this region. Self-management diabetic programs developed by this profession would help to tackle the rising prevalence of diabetes in the LRGV. One county, Cameron County, has an estimated diabetic prevalence of 19.4% (8).
Diabetes Educational Material available and suitable for LRGV patients and the Role of Occupational Therapy in Diabetic Patient Care

Nutrition
Wide arrays of programs in the Lower Rio Grande Valley are classified as nutrition programs. Of those available, only a portion is suitable for Spanish speaking residents, as not all programs include the Spanish language. Focusing on those nutrition programs targeted at diabetics, occupational therapists can enrich these programs by including direct treatment services aimed at independence in self-management of dietary intake. Independence in appropriate diabetic menu creations, in budgeting for diabetic meals, in recognizing nutritious meals in community restaurants, in cooking meals designed for improving the health of diabetics and in shopping for diabetic meals are areas in which occupational therapists would focus a patient-centered, individual plan of care.

Physical activity
The LRGV offers a small number of diabetic physical activity programs. There are four in number (9). Of the four, two programs are based in public schools, limiting their reach to children less than 18 years of age and to school academic calendars. One of the four is a clinic that serves the four counties of the region and is open to all ages. The fourth program is the Texas Agrilife Extension Service or the Texas Cooperative Extension, a division of the Texas A&M System; it serves three of the four counties. Both of these agencies are housed in Hidalgo County. With the prevalence of diabetes growing in the area, it is safe to say that the area is underserved in physical activity sites designed for the diabetic population. Trained and qualified occupational therapists could improve these conditions. Occupational therapists are trained in physical exercise for those with medical disease or conditions. Appropriate precautions are taken and physicians’ orders are followed, to ensure the safety of patients. As occupational therapists are also trained in group dynamics, they can also conduct exercise groups while fostering positive social support from participants. In addition, meaningful physical activity participation is patient centered and is theorized to improve the attainment of patient goals.

Self-care
In this area, occupational therapists can design a patient’s treatment plan such that independence may be attained in management of medication, inspection of feet and prevention of open sores, adaptations to low vision patients in performance of basic activities of daily living, adaptations to everyday tasks that involve the need to discriminate textures with upper extremities and use of adaptive equipment in appropriate activities of daily living. This list is by no means exhaustive and is stated for the general diabetic population.
Diabetes Educational Material Resources in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas (9)

I. Nutrition Resources

   - Nutrition education in English
   - Serving Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy Counties

2. Aptus Therapy Services: 2610 Cornerstone Blvd., Edinburg, TX 78539 (956) 668-1818
   - Nutrition services providing nutrition education to children under 18 years in English and Spanish
   - Serving Hidalgo County

3. Coprima Association, Inc.: 302 Kings Highway, Su. 101, Brownsville, TX 78521 (956) 546-0774
   - Diabetes Education in English and Spanish, serving Cameron County
   - Nutrition Program in English and Spanish, serving Cameron County.

4. El Milagro Clinic: 901 E. Vermont Avenue, McAllen, TX 78503 (956) 664-9416
   - The Wellness Program in English and Spanish
   - Serving Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy Counties

5. Family Health Center: Route 3, Box 12, Rio Grande City, TX 78582 (956) 487-5621
   - One-on-one consultations in English and Spanish
   - Serving Starr County

6. Hidalgo Independent School District: 1217 E. Pirate Drive, Hidalgo, TX 78557 (956) 843-3100
   - Special menus Program in English and Spanish for children under 18 years
   - Serving Hidalgo County

7. Infant and Family Nutrition Agency: 1225 Boca Chica Blvd., Brownsville, TX 78520 (956) 541-9250
   - Family Nutrition in English and Spanish
   - Serving Cameron County

8. Mano a Mano: 302 Kings Highway, Brownsville, TX 78521 (956) 982-0763
   - REACH Program in Spanish for the elderly
   - Serving Cameron County

• Diabetes Support Group in English and Spanish for adults
• Serving Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy Counties

10. Nuestra Clinica del Valle: 1203 E. Ferguson, Pharr, TX 78577 (956) 787-0787
• Diabetes Classes in English and Spanish for adults
• Serving Hidalgo County

11. Port Isabel Independent School District: 202 Port Rd., Port Isabel, TX 78578 (956) 943-0000
• Special Diets Program in English for children under 18 years
• Serving Cameron County

• Diabetes Management Center (recognized by American Diabetes Association)
  o Diabetes Education in English and Spanish
  o Serving Hidalgo County
• Gestational Diabetes Education
  o Nutrition education in English and Spanish for adult females
  o Serving Hidalgo County

• Nutrition Program for Acanthosis Markers in English for children under 18 years
• Serving Cameron County

14. South Texas Hospital: 1301 Ranger Road, Harlingen, TX 78551 (956) 423-3420
• Diabetes education in English and Spanish for adults
• Serving Cameron County

15. Spanish Meadows: 440 E. Ruben M. Torres Blvd., Brownsville, TX 78521 (956) 546-5378
• Special Diets for Diabetics and Those with Special Dietary Needs in English and Spanish for the elderly
• Serving Cameron County

16. Starr County Health Studies: 400 N. Garza, Rio Grande City, TX 76582 (956) 487-5266
• Diabetes Education Classes in English and Spanish for adults
• Serving Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy Counties

17. Texas Commission for the Blind: 1812 W. Jefferson, Harlingen, TX 78550 (956) 423-9411
• Nutrition Education Services in English and Spanish
18. Texas Cooperative Extension: 2401 E. Highway 83, Weslaco, TX 78596 (956) 968-5581
   - Do Well Be Well with Diabetes Program in English and Spanish
   - Serving Cameron, Hidalgo and Starr Counties

   - Dietitian Consultations in English and Spanish
   - Serving Cameron, Hidalgo and Willacy Counties

20. Valley Baptist Medical Center: 2101 Pease Street, Harlingen, TX 78550 (956) 389-1100
   - Cardiac Rehab Classes in English and Spanish for adults
     - Serving Cameron and Willacy Counties
   - Nutrition for Life Program in English and Spanish for adults
     - Serving Cameron, Hidalgo and Willacy Counties

21. Valley Regional Medical Center: 100-A Alton Gloor Blvd., Brownsville, TX 78526 (956) 350-7000
   - Diabetes Management Program in English and Spanish
   - Serving Cameron County

II. Physical Activity Resources

1. El Milagro Clinic: 901 E. Vermont Avenue, McAllen, TX 78503 (956) 664-9416
   - The Wellness Program in English and Spanish
   - Serving Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy Counties

2. Hidalgo Independent School District: 1217 E. Pirate Drive, Hidalgo, TX 78557 (956) 843-3100
   - Special menus Program in English and Spanish for children under 18 years
   - Serving Hidalgo County

   - Nutrition Program for Acanthosis Markers in English for children under 18 years
   - Serving Cameron County

4. Texas Cooperative Extension: 2401 E. Highway 83, Weslaco, TX 78596 (956) 968-5581
   - Do Well Be Well with Diabetes Program in English and Spanish
   - Serving Cameron, Hidalgo and Starr Counties
III. Other Services

   - Training services for diabetes providers in English
   - Serving Cameron, Hidalgo, Star and Willacy Counties

2. McAllen Medical Center: 301 W. Expressway 83, McAllen, TX 78503 (956) 632-4000
   - Diabetes Education Program with focus on behavior change, in English and Spanish
   - Serving Hidalgo County

3. Region 1 Education Service Center: 1900 W. Schunior, Edinburg, TX 78541 (956) 984-6000
   - School Health Network with focus on wellness and general health education in English
   - Serving Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy Counties

4. Starr County Health Studies: 400 N. Garza, Rio Grande City, TX 76582 (956) 487-5266
   - Daily screenings for diabetes in English and Spanish
   - Serving Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy Counties

3. Valley Baptist Medical Center: 2101 Pease Street, Harlingen, TX 78550 (956) 389-1100
   - Diabetes Services with a clinical focus in English and Spanish
   - Serving Cameron County
References


