

Occupational Therapy Professional Development Day

By Cecily Borgstein

Malawi has very few Occupational Therapists, instead much of the rehabilitation is carried out by Rehabilitation Technicians (RTs). RTs are trained at Kachere Training and Rehabilitation Centre, part of Malawi Against Physical Disabilities (MAP), as generic support workers, they have little support and few CPD opportunities.

MAP was started in 1978 by a Polio committee that had been formed to “find, treat, educate and rehabilitate all victims of polio as well as other disabilities”.

The primary service of MAP was its outreach program, MAP historically visited 212 clinics throughout Malawi on a monthly basis seeing anybody with a disability e.g. cerebral palsy, clubfoot, Polio, accidents, burns etc. and provide physiotherapy, orthopaedic appliances and mobility aids like wheelchairs, crutches, clogs and callipers as well as providing on-the-spot training to carers. These outreach services worked hand in hand with sister organisations like Cheshire Homes and the Malawi Council for the Handicapped or MACHOA who set up work shops where people with disabilities could learn to carve or weave in order to have a source of income. MAP is smaller now and does less outreach but places RTs in district hospitals across Malawi.



I spent 6 months volunteering as an Occupational Therapist in Kachere Hospital and during that time was in contact with other members of the Occupational Therapy Association of Malawi (OTAM) and talked about providing training to the RTs, many of whom work in rural areas with little or no supervision and support.

We discussed the position of the rehab technicians: much of the training provided in the 3-year course is by physiotherapists and a vast majority of the limited clinical supervision available is provided by physiotherapists. We wanted to ensure that the training was appropriate but also OT focused to encourage them to bring more OT skills into their practice and to be more confident in their skills and profession as well as offering opportunities for networking and learning from each other.



The study day was free and open to any OTs or RTs, it took about two months to plan and was organised chaos. Until about 2 days before the event we had no idea how many people were coming.

On the day there were 35 attendees from 10 MAP centres and 8 other organisations. MAP paid for the transport and 'per diems' of their employees who attended. The money from a grant from OT Frontiers paid for half the transport costs of all the attendees not from MAP and lunch (very important), and a kind supporter paid for the printing costs of hand outs for each attendee.

There were 5 sessions:

1. The OT Journey
2. Goal Setting and SMART Goals
3. Activity Analysis
4. Upper Limb Assessment and Treatment
5. An Introduction to Cognition

The presentations were developed and presented by an OT from the UK and OT from Australia and an OT from Zimbabwe. When developing the sessions there was much discussion around what to include or not, we considered the environments that our target group, the RTs were working in and what they would be able to use, what they were likely to use and what they would be keen to engage in. For example, in the 6 months one OT had been working in the country, documentation had been an area she had been trying to develop with the therapists she was working with, however it was not something that local colleagues engaged with so a session on documentation was unlikely to impact on their practice. On the other hand, practical skills around assessment and treatment of the upper limb and goal setting were more likely to be integrated into their practice.

We tried to make the sessions as informative and interactive as possible and ended the day with a set of case studies encouraging the participants to integrate the theory from the day into scenarios.

Feedback forms were given out to the participants and the feedback (on a scale of 1-5) was generally positive:

- Most of the information provided was new information for me
Mostly 2's and 3's
- I found the information provided to be engaging and interesting

- Mostly 5's
- I feel the information provided today will help me to understand my patients and their occupational needs
- Mostly 5's
- I think I will be able to use the skills developed today to better assist my patients
- Mostly 5's

Participants said:

- Want more days like this
- More CPD opportunities
- Pre-test and post-test suggested
- Enjoyed group working and experience sharing
- One day isn't enough
- Didn't enjoy the presentation when there was no electricity
- Advised to be more punctual and more organised
- Should include mental health in presentations

Overall it was a successful day offering a rare opportunity for learning and networking to OTs and RAs from across Malawi.