

Clinical reasoning and inter-professional working: the importance of understanding

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Purpose/Rationale:

A career change has given the researcher the relatively rare benefit of clinical experience in both physiotherapy and occupational therapy. There are many similarities between these two professions however there can be a lack of understanding in the way clinical decisions are made. The literature describes their clinical reasoning processes individually but few consider how a mutual understanding of these processes would enhance inter-professional working. This research aimed to explore the clinical reasoning process within the context of falls rehabilitation, whether each profession was aware of the other's clinical reasoning strategies and if this influenced their inter-professional working.

Materials and Methods:

Each profession's specialist interest group for older people sent a participant request to members. Respondents were matched in terms of experience and nature of work and then purposively sampled by location i.e. the nearest pair to the researcher. Participants were sent a standardised case study and then interviewed individually using a semi-structured format. Their clinical reasoning, management strategies and perception of the other profession's thought processes were explored. This qualitative methodology used in-depth interviews, which lasted up to an hour and were audio recorded.

Analysis:

The interviews were transcribed and coded against a set template for thematic analysis. Using this approach, the data was coded for the main themes of clinical reasoning, therapists' awareness of the other profession's clinical reasoning and influences of inter-professional working on falls rehabilitation.

Results:

The study discovered differences in the participants' knowledge and clinical reasoning processes. Both thought that an understanding of each other's clinical reasoning would positively influence inter-professional working, however neither demonstrated an actual awareness, instead qualifying their responses in terms of other factors. Shared goal setting, awareness of profession specific skills and knowledge were seen as the most important factors.

Conclusions:

This exploratory research sought to describe occupational therapy and physiotherapy clinical reasoning processes and their influence on inter-professional working within the context of falls rehabilitation. The ability of these professions to understand each other and collaborate inter-professionally can enable the achievement of best practice within multidisciplinary teams managing falls rehabilitation.