



Report of the Professional Issues Forum on **Active Transportation and the Role of Occupational Therapy** Winnipeg, MB CAOT Conference May 2015

Professional Issue Forums (PIFs) are held annually at the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) Conference. PIFs address priority health and social issues, and emerging practice areas in occupational therapy. PIFs involve presentations from a panel of experts and participants are invited to contribute their perspectives. The discussion leads to strategies and recommendations for action for CAOT, individual occupational therapists and stakeholders to advance occupational therapy practice and the profession's presence in these areas.

Introduction

Active transportation is “any form of human-powered transportation” (Transport Canada, 2011). It encompasses all human-powered transportation modes used to commute to work, to get to school, or to engage in one's community. Examples of active transportation include walking, cycling, wheelchair mobility and rollerblading. Active transportation modes can also be combined with motorized modes, such as when using public transportation (Transport Canada, 2011). For example, active transportation might be part of a travel chain, during which individuals take a train with their bike for part of their route to work and then cycle the rest of the route.

At an individual level, using active transportation has the potential to increase people's engagement in physical activity, to decrease the risk of chronic disease and weight gain (Rosenberg, Sallis, Conway, Cain, & McKenzie, 2006) and to improve mental health and well-being (Biddle & Asare, 2012). Engaging in regular physical activity offers health benefits for people of all ages and abilities (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011). At a societal level, using active transportation has multiple environmental and economic benefits. For example, active transportation generates far less air pollution and involves fewer infrastructure costs than motorized transportation (Litman, 2015). Increasing the population's physical activity level has been declared a global public health priority (World Health Organization [WHO], 2010). Successful strategies to promote and support active transportation initiatives will require consideration of multiple micro and macro components, and coordination of the actions of different sectors and stakeholders (WHO, 2007).

Occupational therapists have an important role in promoting active transportation (Mulholland Johnson, Ladd, & Klassen, 2009). Our knowledge of the dynamic interaction among people, their occupations and the environment uniquely positions us to highlight how active transportation can serve as a means to occupational engagement. We are aware that while active transportation is often a mean to participating in other occupations such as paid work, it can also be a meaningful occupation in and of itself. We have a unique understanding of the complex influences that are shaping active transportation choices such as personal capabilities,

time demands of various formal and informal roles, and the safety/accessibility of environments. Our skills and perspectives enable us to contribute to community actions and public discussions regarding the planning of active transportation initiatives, ensuring they take the needs of a diverse population into account. Through our expertise and leadership, we can be change agents and have a crucial role in health promotion.

The Professional Issue Forum on active transportation, held on May 29, 2015, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, provided a platform for critical discussion, aiming to enable Canadian occupational therapists to embrace a leadership role in supporting active transportation.

Objectives

1. To introduce practice opportunities in the field of active transportation;
2. To explore and document the role occupational therapists can have in active transportation;
3. To identify the resources that exist and that are needed to support practitioners involved or interested in the area of active transportation;
4. To identify strategic partnership opportunities with stakeholder groups interested in the advancement of active transportation.

Panel presentations

Dr. Jacquie Ripat, Associate Professor in the Department of Occupational Therapy at the University of Manitoba presented a brief overview of her research that has addressed winter walkability and wheel-ability within the City of Winnipeg. Her research focuses on understanding the interaction between people who use assistive technologies and their environments, in order to promote community participation. She outlined ways in which occupational therapists can conceptualize their role in active transportation and shared some key lessons learned in addressing macro-level issues encountered in her research. Dr. Ripat's presentation - http://www.caot.ca/pdfs/pif/AT_PIF_%20Ripat.pdf

Chris Sobkowicz, Coordinator of the Access Advisory Committee for the City of Winnipeg, and **Judy Redmond**, the Universal Design Coordinator for the City of Winnipeg, shared their perspectives on policy and decision-making in supporting active transportation for all citizens. Based on their experiences of collaborating with occupational therapists, they discussed the knowledge and skills needed to contribute effectively in the policy arena. Chris Sobkowicz/Judy Redmond's presentation - http://www.caot.ca/pdfs/pif/AT_PIF_Redmond.pdf

Annick St-Denis, the Active Transportation Director at Vélo Québec, presented the non-profit organization's "On the Move in the Community" program, which works to create safe environments and make it easier for families to cycle during their commutes (Vélo Québec, 2015). This program has had successes in many forms, including securing 10 years of public and private funding and enlisting the participation of almost 900 primary schools throughout the province of Quebec. Annick St-Denis' presentation - http://www.caot.ca/pdfs/pif/AT_PIF_StDenis.pdf



Roundtable and Facilitated Discussions

The second and third segments of the forum consisted of break-out roundtable discussions and a final facilitated discussion. First, the participants of the PIF were divided into two groups, and each group was assigned a facilitator and note-taker. The facilitators structured the discussions around five questions. These questions (in bold) and the key points from both roundtable discussions and the facilitated group discussion (in bullet points) are listed below.

1. How is active transportation related to the practice of occupational therapy and/or the role that occupational therapists can take?

- Occupational therapists are aware of:
 - The unique needs of individuals;
 - Influence of the environment on enabling occupation and participation;
 - Principles of universal design;
 - How to conduct needs assessment of individuals, and of communities
 - The value of taking a health promotion approach.
- Clients seek occupational therapy for transportation, mobility, and community access issues;
- Occupational therapists can use assessments that address mobility, such as the Canadian Occupational
- Performance Measure. These assessments can be used to start the “active transportation” conversation with users;
- Advocacy opportunities include:
 - Individual problem-solving with pedestrians and wheeled mobility users regarding their active transportation options;
 - Writing articles in newspapers about health promotion activities and creating, identifying, or promoting? accessible environments for active transportation;
 - Speaking to the city and policy-makers about active transportation as a health promotion activity that needs to be supported by policies and the environment.

2. What are the active transportation issues that occupational therapists might encounter?

- There are barriers to advocacy, including:
 - Not knowing who to talk to in order to influence change;
 - Navigating policies and politics;
 - The need to advocate at policy and decision-making levels on unpaid time as community advocacy is often not supported in employment descriptions or mandates;
 - Minimal evidence to support active transportation as an occupational therapy domain.
- Environmental inclusion and accommodation issues, including:
 - Limited funding opportunities clients' home/environmental equipment or adaptations, modifications to methods of active transportation, or programs and research;
 - Community design that does not support inclusive active transportation;
 - Recognizing that true universal design, ensuring equal access for everyone, can be very difficult to achieve. Environmental adaptations that work for some may be prohibitive for others. Ongoing environmental analysis is required;
 - Challenges related to shared spaces and lack of clarity on active transportation "rules of the road";
 - Competing interests between active transportation and a community's business/financial goals.
- Clients' perceived or real barriers to participating in active transportation, including:
 - Safety - Environmental safety concerns (such as presence of bike lanes, quality of roads and paths, rest-stops, crime rates, lack of lighting) and unfamiliarity of routes between origin and destinations of active transportation can deter active transportation;
 - Competing occupational roles - Clients' competing roles (such as parent) may diminish practicality of active transportation;
 - Location/Environment - A person's residence may be seen as located too far from their employment or other active transportation destinations;
 - Physical barriers - A person's physical or mental health status could render active transportation unfeasible. For example, a person with rheumatoid arthritis may choose to conserve energy rather than expend it on active transportation;
 - Resources - A person may not have the financial or social resources to be able to afford their preferred method of active transportation (such a bicycle, or the extra time in the day that it could require).
- Societal perceptions and attitudes toward active transportation:
 - Communities may not value active transportation;
 - Communities may not be aware of the benefits of active transportation.

3. What knowledge and resources do we have as occupational therapists to address active transportation options and issues? What is needed?

- Occupational therapists have:
 - Knowledge of ergonomics and mobility, inclusion and accommodation, principles of universal design, and the interplay between person, environment, and occupation;
 - Skills for activity analysis, advocacy, research, and program development and evaluation;
 - Access to community resources and partnerships;

- Commitment to a client-centered approach to active transportation and consideration for the impact on individuals and communities.
- Occupational therapists need:
 - Increased knowledge of bylaws, policies, and urban planning;
 - Further skill development for communicating with stakeholders to effect change, including learning the general “language” of other professions and stakeholders;
 - To create opportunities to collaborate with other planning committees working toward promoting active transportation;
 - To identify allies in various places, such as within motor associations;
 - To be persistent! We may need to meet with various stakeholder groups multiple times in order to be heard or have an effect.

4. How can you be a change agent in the realm of active transportation in the areas of:

- **Practice?**
 - By making active transportation part of the conversation with our clients and within our agencies/institutions;
 - By celebrating health promotion, recognizing that active transportation is good for people for several ways (e.g., environment, health, convenience with schedule, economics, lack of other transportation options)
- **Education?**
 - By introducing health promoting effects of active transportation into educational curriculums;
 - By developing and facilitating continuing education opportunities within our agencies/institutions, with regulatory bodies and/or associations.
- **Research?**
 - By investigating issues and needs across the travel chain and intersections of person, environment, and occupation;
 - By engaging in knowledge sharing activities from research that supports occupational therapists’ role in active transportation.
- **Policy decisions?**
 - By volunteering for boards and committees within the community that address active transportation environments and policies;
 - By advocating to policy makers for occupational therapy involvement in policy decisions;
 - By collaborating with city and urban developers to create healthy environments conducive to active transportation.
- **As a community member/citizen?**
 - By maintaining awareness of current resources and advocacy opportunities for development of needed resources;
 - By writing to Members of Parliament about the importance of active transportation from a citizen’s perspective.

5. What are the priorities?

The forum participants agreed that mobility — of all kinds — is a basic human right. Participants also agreed that despite the fact that more attention has been given to the importance of community mobility over the past 10 years, there is still work to be done at the micro-, meso- and macro-levels. The identified priorities are:

- To respond to the call to action to address active transportation and community mobility. In the past 10 years, there has been more attention to community mobility – but there is still work to be done. Future efforts should include working with clients, consumer organizations, communities and decision-makers to enable and promote active transportation;
- To consciously identify active transportation issues or goals with our clients and consider how the person, occupation, and environmental factors influence one’s ability to engage in active transportation. However, we need to be conscious not to “pressure” those who may not share our values of active transportation – rather we should view it as a choice that must be respected.
- To develop opportunities for student placements working at the community level with urban developers, city planners or policy-makers;
- To establish community advocacy as part of the occupational therapists employment role. We can start the discussion with colleagues and managers, and reflect on how the broader aspects of active transportation can impact our clients. We need to be supported by our managers to engage in community advocacy actions where appropriate;
- To profile our key role in this area, as active transportation can be a meaningful occupation in and of itself, as well as a means to enhance community and social participation.

Additional Comments and Considerations arising from Discussions

- Making it “harder” is not always better. Occupational therapists need to consider that there could be excess or negative impacts to active transportation. It is important to have a balanced perspective and not to “over-value” active transportation where it is not appropriate. For example;
 - Some people choose to rely on using less active methods of transportation in order to still do what they need to do with their day, and celebrate the range of what they can do (ie. the ‘just right’ challenge);
 - It can be dangerous for someone to run or bike in a Canadian winter climate and personal safety may be the priority;
 - Some people may push active transportation to a limit where it can be dangerous for their health.
- Active transportation interventions do not have to be complicated or extensive They can be as simple as suggesting someone park a little bit further or disembark from their bus one stop early to walk a little bit more if it is not feasible for them to walk to the location (e.g., someone with limited endurance following a stroke). It is about identifying the opportunities and supporting choice.
- There are many opportunities to learn from international communities and policies
- It may be important for occupational therapists to role model active transportation in order to be able to “walk the talk”. “Lead by example” is a way for clients to feel more comfortable approaching us to ask for help. At the same time, we must recognize that our experience may not be the same as the client’s experience.

Summary of Events

The Professional Issue Forum on Active transportation and the role of occupational therapy was an energetic, thoughtful and critical activity. Through the presentations, roundtable

conversations and facilitated discussions, participants became aware of many aspects of this area of practice, including opportunities, barriers and considerations.

Active transportation was recognized as being within the scope of occupational therapy practice, particularly through our expertise in assessing and intervening at the interface of the person, the occupation and the four different aspects of the environment (physical, social, institutional and cultural (Polatajko, Townsend, & Craik. 2007). Our role is enhanced when we adopt a client-centred approach, which allows us to ensure that the unique needs of individuals and communities are considered within an environmental context. Furthermore, occupational therapists can advocate for consideration of universal design principles in the planning and development of transportation options.

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