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The views of rheumatology occupational therapists of a vocational rehabilitation training programme

Yeliz Prior, Sarah Bodell, Aparna Amanna, Alison Hammond

University of Salford, Centre for Health Sciences Research, Salford, UK

Objective: Work disability in inflammatory arthritis (IA) is common. Rheumatology occupational therapists (OTs) are well-placed to identify people with IA's work problems as their role includes evaluating the impact of arthritis on functional ability, work and social roles. However, most OTs in the UK have little or no experience in vocational rehabilitation (VR).

Materials-Methods: As part of a pilot randomised controlled trial, a VR intervention was modified for use in the UK from an American study (Allaire et al, 2003). Rheumatology OTs (n=9) attended three-day training in this VR delivered by VR experts. Training included talks, practical sessions, co-teaching, role play, self-study, on-going mentor support, and a resource file with information on VR strategies, adaptive equipment, legislation and employment services. After training and intervention delivery with 2-3 patients each, semi-structured interviews with the OTs were conducted, recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed by three researchers to ensure validity.

Results: Two overarching themes emerged from the data. These were: the varying levels of prior knowledge and experience of VR amongst rheumatology OTs; and the need for a more comprehensive approach to VR training. All OTs found the training and resources very valuable, but several stated that the training programme assumed too much prior knowledge and expertise in VR. More comprehensive training, including more practical training, activity analysis and practising VR delivery with feedback were recommended.

Conclusion: Rheumatology OTs needed a more extensive VR training programme. For a full trial, we will extend this to 5 days including more practical experience.

Keywords: Rheumatology, work-rehabilitation, training, occupational therapists, qualitative research