

*Occupational therapy for people with autism:
Current practices, training needs and use of evidence*

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are currently diagnosed in 1 in 100 children, reflecting a 25 fold prevalence increase in the past 3 decades. In 2007 the Australian Government injected \$190 million over four years for autism-specific programs. In combination these two factors have led to the demand for occupational therapy (OT) services outstripping supply, and an influx of OTs working in the field with limited autism-specific experience. In this workshop we will report on a study funded by the Occupational Therapists Board of Queensland that investigated OT practices, confidence and professional development needs in this field. The study involved a series of focus groups and a statewide survey of registered OTs in Queensland. The findings will be discussed in terms of future directions for the OT profession in this field. We will also discuss issues with regard to the use of evidence by OTs. In particular we will explore this issue in relation to sensory processing approaches, as the efficacy and empirical support of some sensory processing interventions have been questioned. We will review sensory processing interventions in terms of their evidence base, and their social inclusivity, using an occupation-centred focus. A clinical reasoning framework will be presented with the aim of assisting occupational therapists to work collaboratively with children, families and other team members to make evidence-informed and socially valid decisions in their choice of sensory processing interventions. The use of this clinical reasoning framework will be illustrated using some case studies of children with ASD.