

Retention of Occupational Therapists Across Employment Settings

Research Team: Robyn Hastie, Brenda J. Gamble, Audrey Laporte, Raisa B. Deber & Susan Rappolt
 Research Partner: College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario, Barbara Worth, Registrar

Introduction

Restructuring of the health care system and in particular, the shift in health care delivery from hospital to home and community has been associated with great fluctuation in occupational therapists' employment sectors, positions and status.

Objective

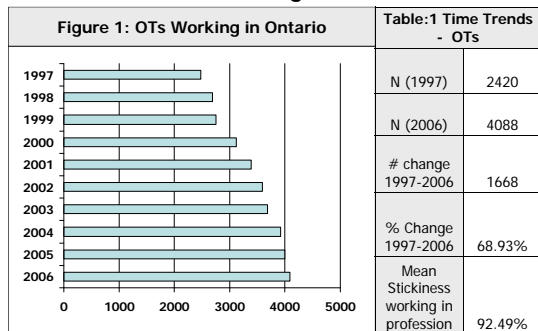
This study analyzes the changes occupational therapists made concerning their employment sub-sectors, positions and status during a ten year period.

Methods

A longitudinal database of 5316 occupational therapists registered in any year from 1997 to 2006 was constructed in partnership with the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario. Occupational therapists' employment retention for any given year was calculated for sub-sectors (hospital, chronic care centre/long-term care [CCC/LTC], community, and other), positions (manager/administrator, direct client care, educator/researcher, and other), and employment status (full-time, part-time, and casual).

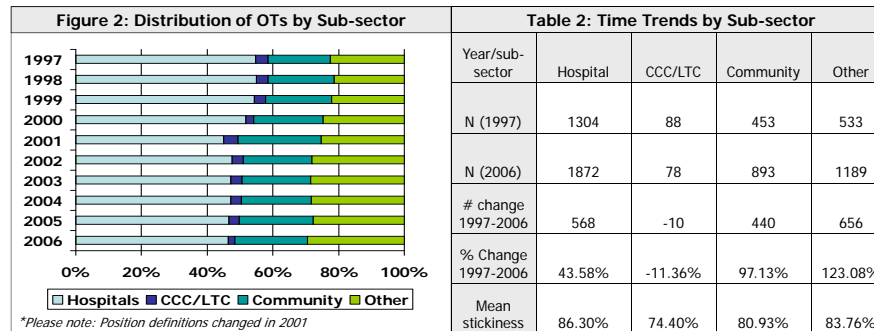
Stickiness is defined as the transitional probability that a OT will remain in the same work setting in year "t+1" as in year "t". Retention across employment settings was determined by calculating stickiness by **sub-sector** (hospital, chronic care centre/long-term care, community, and other – government, private practice, education), **position** (direct client care, manager/administrator, educator/researcher, and other – health promotion, equipment sales, public relations), and **employment status** (full-time, part-time, and casual).

1: OTs Working in Ontario

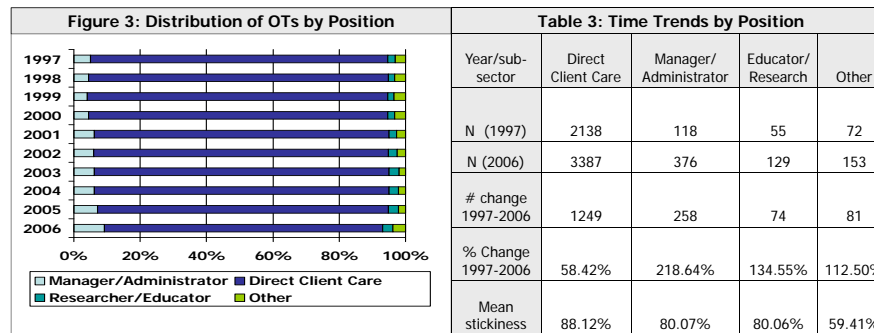


Results

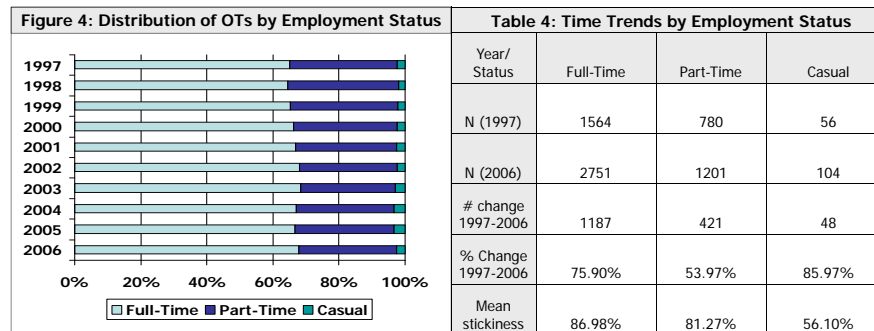
2: Distribution of OTs by Sub-sector



3: Distribution of OTs by Position



4: Distribution of OTs by Employment Status



Discussion

The number of OTs practicing in Ontario has increased substantially from 1997 to 2006 (Figure 1). Mean stickiness for working in the profession is high (Table 1).

The majority of OTs continue to work in Hospitals (Figure 2). Retention varies, with stickiness being 86% in the Hospital sub-sector, 83% in Other, 81% in the Community sub-sector, and 74% in the shrinking CCC/LTC sub-sector. Note that a low stickiness in an expanding sub-sector implies the need to fill new jobs; in contrast, a shrinking sub-sector may force workers to change jobs even if they would rather not do so.

There is also high stickiness in the nature of the jobs (Figure 3), with 88% of those providing Direct Client Care continuing to do so. This was followed closely by Manager/Administrator (80%) and Educator/Researcher (80%) roles. Despite the large expansion of the Other position group (112.5%), these roles had low stickiness (59%).

The number of full-time positions for occupational therapists increased by 76% during the 10 year study period (Figure 4), with part-time and casual employment positions also increasing. However, casual employment (stickiness 56%) seems less desirable than either full-time (87%) or part-time (81%) employment (Table 4).

Conclusions

Despite the rhetoric of a shift from hospitals to community and home, occupational therapists were more likely to retain their employment in hospitals. Policies for service delivery outside of hospitals should be analyzed with the view to improving the retention of practicing occupational therapists in these sectors. Overall, there is a high ability of the profession of occupational therapy to retain its work force during the period under study. However, casual employment appears to be less desirable, and a relatively high proportion of those working casual do not remain in that employment status.

For more information, please see: www.teamgrant.ca
 This project is funded by CIHR grant # 79849