

Baum, Carolyn and Cox, Diane ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2691-6423>
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Occupational performance measures for health and wellbeing: research and practice

British Journal of Occupational Therapy

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Carolyn Baum, Diane Cox

It is an honour to act as guest editors for this special issue of the British Journal of Occupational Therapy (BJOT), containing current research and concerns about occupational performance from Australia, Chile, Ireland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Japan.

Occupational performance, the 'doing of meaningful activities, tasks, and roles through complex interaction between the person and the environment' (Baum et al 2011), is important for occupational therapists. It describes our unique role and people's ability to engage in meaningful activities, tasks, and roles that support both their participation in daily life and their sense of wellbeing (Christiansen and Baum 2005).

Our profession's initial focus was on the central and organizing principles of occupation, yet little research was conducted then and we were guided by principles (Burnette 1923). Subsequently, practice was influenced by biomedical models (Friedland 1998), with occupation considered as using purposeful activity to achieve goals linked to physical recovery. Over the past 30 years, models of practice organized around the principles of occupational performance have arisen from a return to the founding concepts of the profession.

Such models connect the individual and their capabilities to the environment, enabling them to carry out their roles, activities, and tasks.

The doing associated with daily life requires the use of evidence from occupational science, neuroscience, biology, and social sciences, and a variety of knowledge is pertinent to an occupational performance approach. While it is not necessary to study all these areas simultaneously, it is necessary to direct our work using measurement tools that will increase our understanding of the meaningful activities, tasks, and roles that support individuals striving to participate in their daily lives.

The articles in this issue of BJOT add to our understanding of occupational performance from the consideration of levels of impairment (Kenny et al 2014, Parkinson et al 2014), goals (Poulsen et al 2014), developing and using measures (Morgan-Brown and Chard 2014, Plastow et al 2014), reliability (Chien et al 2014, Scott et al 2014), participation (Abu-Awad et al 2014, Nakamura-Thomas et al 2014), and community living (Chisholm et al 2014, Davis and Rodd 2014), and show the diversity of research required to increase our understanding of the complexity of occupational performance and occupational therapy.