Productive Aging: Sustaining Employment for Older People

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Goals of Presentation

• Participants will understand how employment may contribute to longevity.

• Participants will be aware of strategies to engage older people in employment for economic sustainability.
Remember Older Workers in Your Past
Effects of Aging on Work

- Aging brings changes to all parts of the body, from decline in brain cell connections to decrease in muscle mass, impaired vision and hearing.

- Decreased resistance to heat and cold stress, and many other physiologic functions decline predictably with age.
Impact of Age on Cognitive Function More Complicated

• Some mental processes such as those requiring spatial abilities, problem solving, and processing of complex stimuli are especially age sensitive.

• Performing multiple simultaneous tasks or holding multiple items in working memory are examples of these age dependent processes, which may be more impaired with age.
Models About Work: Job Strain Model

– Jobs associated with low job control, high job demands, low social support at work, and combinations of these factors may be stressful and lead to poor health outcomes.

– The model associated stress with disease: cardiovascular disease and dementia.


Need for Employment: Cost of Living Up and Savings Down

• Even if employees delay retirement past 65, many are still at risk of running out of money before they die.

• This fear explains why a growing number of older workers in several studies have said they're not sure if they will ever retire.

• Many retirees report that they stopped working sooner than planned due to health problems, job loss, or having to take care of a family member topping the list of reasons for leaving the workforce.
Other Reasons for Working:
“To find joy in work is to discover the fountain of youth”
Pearl S. Buck

• Inspired to Work: Working beyond Retirement Age

• Longevity and health in the following domains:
  – Cognitive
  – Physical
  – Social
  – Emotional/Control/Independence
Downside of Working: How Can OT Help with These Issues?

• Stress

• Lack of control on job

• Physical strain, improper ergonomics

• Does not fit into family needs or lifestyle of friends
Beyond Aging: Disease
Case Study: Early Onset Dementia

Rudy Rice, 73, learned how to run a road grader in the 1957 and that became his career.

Dementia started at age 57. Rice inherited early onset dementia. His mother and two sisters also had the disease.
Rice reports he was able to work in spite of his growing memory problems because his job was repetitive, driving back and forth over sections of road.
Strategies to maintain engagement of older people in employment – How can OT’s assist:

• Support in achieving **occupational balance**
• Assessing & recommending **occupational adaptation**
• Ensuring **occupational justice**
• Promoting **occupational enrichment**
• Assessing **occupational potential**
• Raising the expectations of society & the individual to maintain a productive lifestyle
• Health Promotion
Occupational Imbalance

- Danger of occupational imbalance at the onset of retirement
- Further imbalance with changes in health, social situation & roles with advancing age
Occupational Adaptation

• Within the work environment
  – Ergonomic adaptations
  – Working with employers
  – Occupational analysis
  – Universal design
  – Flexible working
  – Job sharing
  – Job matching
Occupational Adaptation – Rachel’s story

- things are taking more time but how much is health and how much is advancing age, I don’t know and of course, medication keeps you going but it also had an impact so its balancing that. I think one key lesson is I’m not proud...Whatever adaptations I need I’ve just had.

- I can manage myself with my adapted bathroom, hoist in the bedroom etc. I have a power chair for the house when I’m tired, buggy out there and car for as long as I can drive it.

So having those adaptations enables you to do your work role, as it conserves your energy?

- Absolutely it does and I find that liberating. It’s just technology in another form and I’m happy with that, my life has been technology in one form or another. It’s a servant, mobiliser and enabler so why not!
Facilitating occupational justice

Emily –

• Diagnosis of dementia
• Living in residential care
• Part of a job swop co-operative
• Utilising previous skill of ironing which is exchanged for time of someone to come & read to her

recognising the wide range of capacities and resources among older people (WHO 2007)
Occupational Enrichment

“..anyway, then Joe broke his leg & I volunteered to go to school to help him while he was in a wheelchair & I stayed 6 years, volunteering in reception class one day a week”. (June)

“Monday & Tuesday it was church volunteering, Wednesday there was shopping on the free bus. And then Thursday was the school and Friday was our free day off – but that’s altered now because June volunteers at the museum so we don’t have a free day really”. (Roy)
Occupational Potential

people’s capacity to do what is required and what they have the opportunity to do, to become whom they have the potential to be”

(Wicks 2005 p 137)

Mr Clements, who turned 100 in January, spends two mornings a week at work. His roles include "filing, shredding and making tea".

He said: "I went for a month's trial and it progressed from there. "I like everyone who works there, they are very, very good to me." Before he took retirement, Mr Clements's jobs included making torpedoes. (BBC Essex online, 2013)

- 6 month preventative lifestyle orientated interventions by occupational therapists
- Value of occupational approach to support older people in lifestyle redesign
- Benefit of engaging in personal & meaningful occupations
- Focussed on time use, conserving energy, transportation, rehearsal, social relationships & changing habits & routines
- Such programmes could assist older people to see their potential in maintaining employment & a productive lifestyle

(Jackson et al 1998, Clark et al 2011)
Older Workers of today...
Thoughts to take away..

- Maintaining a productive lifestyle as we enter older age maybe significant in contributing to health & wellbeing & longevity
- We have a role in supporting older people to maintain a productive lifestyle - ways to maintain productivity & employment should be seen as part of assessment for older people
- Utilising local networks to support older people to maintain a productive lifestyle & investigate employment opportunities – ie cross generational working
- Implementing recommendations from national organisations – Department of work & Pensions has several helpful guides for older people & employers to draw on as does Age UK
- Educating older people & employees about the worth of older people – giving hope & inspiration
References


