Client-centered ergonomic approach

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Client-centered ergonomic approach

- This approach emphasizes participation of the worker and organization in return to work and occupational ergonomic processes.
- Equitable involvement, partnership, and clearly understood responsibilities of all key stakeholders.
- The worker
- The employer
- The union or worker representative
- Health and safety representatives
- Allied health professionals
- Ergonomists
- Engineers
- Vendors or manufacturers
Principles of Client-Centered Practice

1. Enacting participation and partnering throughout the process
2. Respecting and enabling worker and organization choices, needs, and knowledge
3. Focusing on person-environment occupation (PEO) relationships in the practice context
4. Addressing physical comfort and emotional support needs of clients
5. Fostering open and transparent communications and knowledge exchange
6. Establishing a shared vision for ergonomic management
7. Establishing shared and realistic goals among work parties
8. Creating opportunities that engage workplace parties in problem solving and decision making
9. Ensuring a flexible and individualized occupational therapy approach
Enacting participation and partnering throughout the process

- Enacting a client-centered approach requires a collaborative partnership between workers, workplace parties, employers, external agencies such as insurers, and therapists.
- These partnerships require a power shift in the expertise and knowledge from the therapist to clients.
- As a therapist you may need to become more aware of your own partnering skills and approach to collaborative care.
Respecting and Enabling Clients’ Choices, Needs, and Knowledge

- Respect is demonstrated through listening, actively learning, and understanding.
- At the worker level, therapists need to consider workers’ diverse life experiences, coping styles, and unique backgrounds.
- Inviting workers to express their preferences, needs, and perceptions about their capacities for work opens the door for workers to feel that their views are valued.
Focusing on Person-Environment Occupation Relationships in the Practice Context

- At the core of this process is the examination of relationships among the capacities, skills, and resources of workers (person).
- The multidimensional factors of the work environment (environment), and work demands and processes (occupation) that may contribute to occupational performance issues and their resolution.
Occupational performance difficulties of workers and those commonly experienced by groups of workers are closely interwoven with their environments and occupations.

Environments are multidimensional and vary from one organization to another (e.g., with respect to policies, norms of behavior, methods of communication, approaches to dispute resolution).
Workers vary in the skills and capacities to meet the physical, emotional, and cognitive demands of work.

The person environment-occupation (PEO) perspective provides therapists with an approach that considers the worker’s ergonomic needs in the workplace context while recognizing that the worker’s issues are also embedded in the realities and complexities of his or her workplace culture.
To make informed and effective decisions, clients need to feel comfortable and receive adequate information about occupational performance issues.

Frameworks emphasize that therapists need to have an open, caring manner and need to carefully listen to workers’ or employer descriptions of problems and need
Fostering open and transparent communications and knowledge exchange

- Therapist must identify barriers and challenges that can hinder communications at the individual level when interacting with workers as well as with other workplace parties.
- At the worker level, workers may fear disclosing information for fear of reprisals in the workplace from employers and co-workers.
● It is imperative that the therapist be sensitive to the worker’s relationship with the employer and that an environment of trust that encourages knowledge sharing and exchange be created.

● At the organizational level the therapist must respect the confidentiality of proprietary information.
Establishing a Shared Vision for Ergonomic Management

- In the workplace, different parties may have different views on how ergonomic outcomes are achieved.
- Thus, the therapist needs to elicit an understanding of workers’, unions’, and management beliefs about responsibilities for safe work behaviors.
Some parties perceive that safety and ergonomics are an employer’s responsibility, or a health and safety department’s responsibility, or the therapist’s responsibility.

In the absence of a shared vision about ergonomic management, therapists need to work with workers and employers to generate a common understanding about ergonomic principles and the types of actions and efforts required at the individual and workplace levels to create opportunities for safe and optimal work performance.
The therapist must be aware of his or her responsibilities and roles within a client-centered ergonomic approach that will also support knowledge exchange and application by the workers and the organization.
Establishing Shared and Realistic Goals

- In a collaborative approach, responsibility for goals and outcomes is shared, and thus the success is dependent on the commitment of workers and organizations.
- This type of process can also support setting goals and an shared action plan for how the interventions will proceed with a clear ownership for worker and employer responsibilities in the plan.
Creating Opportunities That Engage Clients in Decision Making and Problem Solving

- Involving workers and workplaces in decision making to solve and manage ergonomic problems is key to developing a sense of ownership and accountability for implementing safe practices.
- Therapists can support this through recognizing that workers and employers are the experts when it comes to knowing their problems, how they solve problems, and how these problems affect their lives, especially at work.
Ensuring a Flexible and Individualized Occupational Therapy Approach

- When working in industry, the therapist needs to clearly communicate what he or she has to offer employers or managers and explain how services may or may not help resolve the ergonomic issues under discussion.

- To be effective, the therapist must be flexible in meeting client needs, respecting the resources and services available uniquely to each organization.
Therapists also need to be reflective to become more aware of their actions and the efforts needed to remain within the scope of practice and to gain a deeper appreciation of the influence of their actions on others.

This is especially important in client-centered practice.
Occupational ergonomics

- The strategies and processes that aim to prevent injury and to promote optimal human performance and functioning at work.
- Through workplace systems design, equipment, and tool design.
Return to work

- The collaborative processes
- The worker, employer and health professional involved in establishing, implementing, progressing, and evaluating a work reintegration plan for enabling a worker with an injury to resume a pre-injury job or start a new one
Person-Environment-Occupation model

- This model elaborates an understanding of occupational performance that is characterized by the complex interaction of factors and relationships among the person, the environment, and the occupation.
In ergonomics, the person refers to the worker with the ergonomic concern.
The environment refers to the workplace.
The occupation refers to the work demands.
The PEO model can be used as a tool in client-therapist alliances to systematically examine complex occupational performance issues.

The model focuses on the relationships among the worker, the work environment, and the work itself to create a structure for problem-solving strategies.
This approach can assist therapists to address not only worker issues, but also the impact of organizational relationships, systems, and attitudes.

Ultimately the PEO model is designed to help facilitate communication with all members of the workplace.
Ethics and challenges in implementing a client-centered approach

- The priorities of key parties may conflict:
  - The workers may believe that the most urgent ergonomic issues relate to poor equipment,
  - The employer may identify the worker’s unsatisfactory performance and compliance with proper techniques as the priorities.
  - The therapist is confronted with the question of which of these clients’ issues and priorities take precedence.
● Being client-centered does not mean that the therapist must agree with the client or “take sides.”

● Rather, the therapist focuses on the issues as directed by the client and enters the client’s world in a collaborative partnership.

● The therapist may reclarify and ascertain the priorities and needs of both parties and with them may negotiate which issues will be addressed and at what time.
The therapist may encounter attitudinal barriers that have a negative impact on relationships between supervisors and workers.

The early identification of destructive attitudes allows the therapist to take steps before plans are undermined.
Funding issues may also pose ethical dilemmas for the therapist.

Lack of compliance of the worker or employer in carrying out the agreed-on changes also presents the therapist with a dilemma.