Mental Health in Puerto Rico: The Role of Occupational Therapy

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BACKGROUND:  
- Students completed a level I mental health fieldwork in San Juan, Puerto Rico for two weeks.

OBJECTIVES:  
- To learn about the Puerto Rican mental health system; specifically relevant to OT practice.
- To understand the effects of factors such as politics, religion, gender, and socioeconomic status, on OT treatment.

Mental Health Practice in PR

- Mental health services in Puerto Rico are affected by socio-cultural, political and economic factors (Rivera, Fernandez, Torres & Parrilla, 2004)
- Population growth, rise in unemployment, increase crime rate
- Public vs. private
- Among the population of 15-30 y/o, accidents and suicide, both related to mental health issues are on the top 5 causes for death (Nieves, Montero, Rivera, 2012)
- Occupational therapists are employed in mental health facilities in the island (psychiatric hospital, substance use units, inpatient and outpatient settings, day programs, etc.)

Setting 1: Psychiatric Hospital Dr. Ramón Fernández Marina (acute & sub-acute)

- Age group: 18 y/o and older
- Diagnoses: Bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, depression, substance use, etc.

Setting 2: First Hospital Panamericano (inpatient & outpatient)

- Age group: 13 y/o and older
- Diagnoses: PTSD, depression, ADHD, etc.

Role of Occupational Therapy

- Bio-psychosocial model
- Transitioning back into the community
- Communicating with friends, family, caregivers, coworkers, etc.
- Enhancing the role of support systems
- Developing healthy coping strategies
- Providing resources on healing
- Addressing the grief process in mental health
- Engaging the patients in OT treatment
- Acting as patient / client advocates

Experiences

- “It was in the walls of Hospital Dr. Ramón Fernández Marina where for the first time I understood mental health disorders beyond the DSM 5, this time not only relevant to signs and symptoms of a mental health disorder, but rather to the ability to carefully listen to the hearts of my patients” – Amanda, OTS
- Here we do not tell patients “good luck” when they leave, we say “success” - Margarita, OT and FWE to Rosannie
- “I feel blessed to have shared with my FIU classmates and friends such a fulfilling experience. I will forever be grateful for the knowledge I gained from my instructors and the people I met because of it. As they told us everyday in the setting, “Mucho Exito!” (much success) - Rosannie, OTS
- “This experience taught me to not define someone by a quick label (schizophrenic, bipolar, depressed), rather by his or her occupational identity (mother, sister, daughter, and wife)” - Amanda, OTS
- Our gratitude to the occupational therapists in Puerto Rico who supervised our fieldwork, Neyda de León, Lourdes Carmona, and Margarita Gierbolini.

References