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Review Paper

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN SERBIA – FIRST 60 YEARS (1964 – 2024)

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***Abstract.** The foundation and development of occupational therapy as a health profession in Serbia began even before 1964 and the first officially established education program for occupational therapists. Over the course of sixty years, the profession of occupational therapist has changed and developed under the influence of and in accordance with various socio-economic transitions. Changes in professional competences and their constant alignment with contemporary trends in the development of occupational therapy can also be seen through modifications in the education of occupational therapists. The aim of the research paper is to present and analyze the changes in professional competences and their alignment with modern trends in the development of occupational therapy through modifications in the education of occupational therapists. The method of systematic literary analysis was applied, which included the first curriculum and programs of occupational therapy studies and the latest curriculum aligned with the Bologna model of education in order to show the directions in which the profession developed. In conclusion, all changes within study programs throughout the years had been providing occupational therapy students a strong connection between theoretical and practical education and work in health and social institutions.*

Key words: occupational therapy; occupational therapy competences; Bologna model of education

Introduction

A short historical emotional reminder

Occupational therapists in Serbia began their education on courses, because the need for the profession and the services it offers was growing. The courses were organized along with work and were available to employees who wanted to enroll in them. They were exhausting for the participants, but they hit the core of the profession through the ethical relationship with the patient/service user and were based on the real needs of people in the rehabilitation process, long before the needs of patients were discussed as one of the factors that guide and direct occupational therapy services. In the fifties of the last millennium, the idea of retraining did not exist, it was not studied at any level of education. Doctors treated, pedagogues educated, and nurses cared for the sick, and the story ended there - or maybe it didn't. In July 1950, the UN passed a resolution that officially adopted the principle of rehabilitation for all disabled people worldwide and offered advice and technical assistance to member states. Yugoslavia at the time was the first country to ask for help, and by the end of 1950, Dr. Henry Kessler, UN rehabilitation expert, came to Belgrade to establish contacts, select

personnel for education and decide on the location of the future rehabilitation center. The villa at Sokobanjska 13 in Belgrade, which until then served as a home for orphans "Saša and Tamara", was chosen as the location around which the facilities for the Center for the Training of the Disabled - today the Rehabilitation Clinic "Dr. Miroslav Zotović" will be built. The selected experts spent two months at the Kessler Institute in New Jersey for intensive training to perform work in rehabilitation, learning practical work, the concept and organization of the training service and the scope of people with disabilities [1]. Dr. Miroslav Zotović was elected as the leader of the expert team. The center started operating in 1952 after equipping and adapting the facilities. Already in 1953. begins the publication of the magazine "Return to Life" which, aside from the review of literature available at the time from developed countries, also published "case studies" articles of longitudinal monitoring of retrained individuals through the presentation of teamwork.

Method

In the research, a systematic literary analysis of the content of occupational therapy study plans was applied. This analysis includes the first two-year curricula as well as the three-year curricula aligned with the Bologna model of education and accredited in 2007, 2012, 2017 and 2023 and the master's study program from 2019.

Beginning of formal education

The initial group for the establishment and organization of the Department was launched at the initiative of the Federal Institute for Rehabilitation and the Association of Physio and Occupational Therapists of Serbia, and consisted of school teachers and experts in the field of rehabilitation, some of whom were later engaged in teaching: Prof. Dr. Andreja Delini, Dr. Miroslav Zotović, Dr. Živojin Zec, Vjera Božinović, Desanka Jeričević, Irmgard Čolak-Antić, Dr. Ljubiša Milićević, Dr. Branislav Negovanović, Dr. Vladimir Nikolić, Dr. Žarko Nikolić, Dr. Miodrag Sindić, Dr. Vandel Tasić, Dr. Boško Zotović, Dr. Borivoje Todorović, Dr. Nikola Wolf, Dr. Boris Nedvidek, Dr. Jože Karić and Milica Jolić. The efforts of a group of enthusiasts bore fruit and in the academic year 1964/65, although with a delay, the first generation of students was enrolled and the new department for physiotherapy technicians and occupational therapy technicians was formed with the first head of the department, Dr. Ž. Zec [2]. The first curriculum contained 17 subjects, some of which have been retained to this day (of course with changes in names and improved content) because they represent the core of knowledge and skills that are necessary for practicing the profession (Anatomy, Physiology, General patient care, General pathology, Hygiene, Social medicine, Kinesiology, Rehabilitation and care of internal patients, Rehabilitation and care of surgical patients, Medical psychology with mental hygiene and neurology, Basics of general and special pedagogy, Kinesitherapy, Professional rehabilitation, Prosthetics, Therapy with work with technique and sawing).

Box 1 - Average grades and OT students of the generation in the first 10 years

- 1964/65 - Milan Biljanski - 9,90
- 1965/66 - Jelana Aćimović - 8,61
- 1966/67 - Tomislav Kovičić - 7,60
- 1967/68 - Miroslava Vučić - 8,82
- 1968/69 - Branka Bošić - 8,61
- 1969/70 - Stojka Popović - 9,00
- 1970/71 - Dragica Ristovska - 8,77
- 1971/72 - Branislava Bjelobrk - 9,25
- 1972/73 - Ilonka Tot - 9,58

The students of the first generation were mostly employed therapists with completed courses who were already working all over Serbia [3]. In the period from 1955. to 1967. in addition to one three-month course and the other six-month courses, a total of 14 courses were organized, which were slowly discontinued after the establishment of the department at the school. From 108 enrolled students with previously completed courses, 85 graduated with an enviable average grade of 8.55. The first generation remains to this day with an unsurpassed average rating. At that time, Slovenia (SFRJ) had a Higher School for physiotherapists, but not for occupational therapists, so the first educated occupational therapists in Slovenia obtained their education in Belgrade. In the following years, the department of occupational therapists slowly began to enroll candidates coming directly from high school - medical high school, gymnasium, teacher's school or applied arts school. This also leads to a change in admission requirements with the obligation to take a knowledge test in physics, chemistry, biology and Latin and taking an exam to check special skills - manual skills test for occupational therapists.

In the curriculum from 1973, the subject Basics of general and special pedagogy becomes Basics of pedagogy with health education, Rehabilitation and care of internal patients becomes Internal diseases and rehabilitation, subject Rehabilitation and care of surgical patients, changes into Orthopedics, traumatology and rehabilitation, Therapy with work with technique and sawing becomes Occupational therapy and remains a four-semester subject. Subject Professional rehabilitation is lost to appear again in the Bologna reform in 2007 and remain throughout accreditations (2012, 2017, and 2023) [4]. Semester load of students on a weekly basis is equalized at 30 (22 theory and 8 exercises in first semester), 28 (21 theory and 7 exercises in second semester), 30 (16 theory and 14 exercises in third semester), and 30 (6 theory and 24 exercises in fourth semester) .

With the curriculum and statute from 1977, novelties are introduced and subjects are grouped into common for both departments (physiotherapists and occupational therapists) and special. Patient Care, Hygiene, Social Medicine, Anatomy, Physiology, Medical Psychology with Ethics, Kinesiology, General Pathology, Internal Diseases and Rehabilitation, Neurology, Surgery with Orthopedics, Traumatology and Rehabilitation and Prosthetics and Orthotics remain common. Special courses for the Occupational Therapists are Psychiatry, Kinesitherapy - general part, Occupational Therapy and Elective classes. The introduction of Elective

classes in the 4th semester with 3 hours of theory and one hour of exercises enabled full-time students to be guided towards a specific area of rehabilitation in which they are interested, and part-time students to do part of the practical classes at their workplace. For the category of part-time students, which consisted of those who work and study, it was mandatory to organize 20% theoretical and 50% practical classes, and this was realized through seminars [4.5].

Common subjects meant rationalization of teaching staff and space. Exercises took place in classrooms (Patient Care, Kinesitherapy, Occupational Therapy, Kinesiology) and in best teaching institutions. In addition to lectures, seminar papers, practical classes and elective classes, a summer internship was also introduced because it was recognized that a two-year, four-semester education could not fully prepare students for the practical work that awaited them. At the initiative of the department's teachers (although this form of education was not provided for by the Statute), a summer internship was introduced. Those students who wanted to do so were sent during the summer break for a month or two to an institution in Belgrade, one of the school's teaching bases, or across the country to one of the rehabilitation centers. (Ohrid, Skopje, Igalo, Risan, Banja Luka, Teslić, Split, Opatija, Beždan, Melenci, Slankamen, Banja Koviljača).

This type of teaching was realized mainly after the completion of the second year of study, and institutions provided students with accommodation and food, and it often happened that occupational therapists were employed there after obtaining their diploma. Positive experiences, good feedback from the institutions and medical staff where the students were on summer internship, led to the following change in the statute from the school year 1987/1988 to include this type of teaching in the regular curriculum, as a mandatory for all full-time students.

The five-semester course begins in the 1991/1992 school year by applying the curriculum approved by Ministry for education in 1990. Again, the long-term efforts of a group of enthusiasts, people who followed the development of the profession of occupational therapists in developed countries (Nada Senić, Radomir Vučić, Irmgard Čolak-Antić - to mention only the most active ones) and the Society of Physio and Occupational Therapists of Serbia, led to realization the idea of a three-year education, first by obtaining the 5th (school year 1991/92), and later the 6th semester (2002/03) [6]. Over time, various subjects that are not professionally necessary (Pre-soldier training, Fundamentals of Marxism, Self-governing socialism - to name just a few) with different names and contents, were mandatory in academic education at all faculties and higher schools, and reflected changes in society during the second half of the 20th century and lasted in the curricula through various reforms until the introduction of the Bologna Process.

Box 2 - The first teaching institutions of the department

Federal Institute for Rehabilitation
Institute for Orthopedic Prosthetics
Orthopedic clinic
Traumatology hospital
Institute of Tuberculosis
Gynecology and obstetrics clinic
Central specialist polyclinic
Military Medical Academy
Institute for Occupational Medicine
Special surgical orthopedic children's hospital Banjica
Special Children's Hospital for Lung Diseases in Banjica
Institute for Mental Health
Rheumatology Institute of SR Serbia
Institute for Cerebral Palsy
Institute for Emergency Internal Diseases
Institute for rehabilitation of inpatients
Health center Vračar
"Dr. Dragisa Mišović" Hospital



Federal Institute for Rehabilitation



Military Medical Academy

Bologna reform

Since there are no two-semester subjects in the Bologna reform, the first accreditation of the study program, in addition to the introduction of new subjects, also meant the fragmentation of existing ones, which led to an increase in the number of subjects. Elective courses were introduced as an option that gives students the opportunity to choose their affinities within the profession [7-9]. The first reform according to Bologna (2007) provided mandatory independent student work for 5 hours per week during the duration of each semester, which increased the number of hours of practical work, thanks to the efforts of teachers who were making the curriculum and followed education in developed countries of Europe and the world. Practical work was later made official in the following accreditation materials (2012, 2017, and 2023) and the subjects Professional practice 1, Professional practice 2 and Professional practice 3 were introduced into the curricula. All previous reforms, since the establishment of the department, also had a final thesis, as well as a certain number of hours of undergraduate practice scheduled for work with patients who have a

diagnosis about which the candidate is researching. The 2023 reform introduced the subject Professional Research Work in the 6th semester, and it is linked to the preparation of a final thesis.

Master studies

Master's studies lasting two years (120 ECTS) started in 2019/20. and are accredited for 7 years. The title of the master's program is Professional Master's Occupational Therapist - Therapeutic Rehabilitation. The title acquired upon completion is Professional Master's Occupational Therapist. The last battle fought and won was to include Professional Master Occupational Therapist - Level 7.1. in the nomenclature of titles and occupations of the Republic of Serbia - BPS 180 + 120 PMS [10]. The enrollment and organization of classes for the first generations coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, and the measures taken to prevent the spread of the disease greatly affected the organization of work in both health and social institutions, as well as the choice of topic and place of research implementation.

Box 3 -Topics of Master theses and areas that interested candidates

- The role of occupational therapy in the treatment of children with hyperkinetic disorders in the form of additional educational support
- Therapeutic rehabilitation of children with autism
- The importance of motivation in the therapy of adolescents with eating disorders
- Application of occupational therapy in improving the quality of life of people with dementia
- Methods of early treatment of children with cerebral palsy in occupational therapy
- Psychosocial rehabilitation and quality of life of persons with severe mental disorders
- The impact of occupational therapy on the quality of life of people with rheumatoid arthritis
- Occupational therapy assessment in professional rehabilitation
- Community facilities for the inclusion of people with cerebral palsy
- Hand rehabilitation of people with hemiparesis after a stroke
- Art as a therapeutic tool: an overview of the application of art in occupational therapy
- The impact of physical activity on the mental health of secondary medical school students in Subotica
- The role of the occupational therapist in sensory integration therapy for children with autism

Challenges in education impose new ways of promoting the profession, which, besides from verbal tradition history, also requires addressing generations that are informed in different ways, mainly by following social networks. The official Instagram account of the Department College of Health Sciences allows teachers to upload pictures and promotional content.

Box 4 – Occupational Therapy students during exercises in various health and social institutions.



Conclusion

It is obligatory and demanding to present the history of a really "lush" health profession in full, especially through the prism of "only education".

What we teach students and what belongs to the basic set of competencies of occupational therapists is that any assessment of users condition in the therapeutic relationship, if it is not recorded in the documentation, has not been done - it is not something that is taken for granted. An analogy with professional competencies in the field of our occupational therapy practice - that what is not written is not done - inflicted to me during the search for references. The development of the profession meant engaging in professional research work, writing and reporting, but unfortunately team reports of case studies, announcements and presentations from institutions, professional papers written and presented at national gatherings and congresses held in the previous millennium, have either not been preserved or are unavailable for various reasons. Their finding and recording would represent a substantial addition to the history of the profession. A research challenge that I hope to reach and realize in a future work. The comprehensiveness of the individual efforts of the people who breathed life into and designed a demanding and at the time of its creation new profession in the territory of Serbia for this research are presented in the contents of the curricula.

In relation to the set research goal of perceiving an occupational therapy through curriculum reforms, the conclusions that have been imposed are that through all curriculum changes in the past 6 decades of formal education of occupational therapists in Serbia, the individual efforts and enthusiasm of people who have a vision and look ahead are extremely important.

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Pictures – private archive

RADNA TERAPIJA U SRBIJI - PRVIH 60 GODINA (1964 – 2024)

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Sažetak. Osnivanje i razvoj radne terapije kao zdravstvene profesije u Srbiji počeli su još pre 1964. godine i prvog zvanično ustanovljenog programa edukacije radnih terapeuta. Tokom šezdeset godina, profesija radnog terapeuta se menjala i razvijala pod uticajem i u skladu sa različitim društveno-ekonomskim tranzicijama. Promene profesionalnih kompetencija i njihovo stalno usklađivanje sa savremenim pravcima razvoja radne terapije mogu se sagledati i kroz modifikacije u obrazovanju radnih terapeuta. Primena metode sistematske literarne analize od prvog nastavnog plana i programa studija radne terapije do najnovijeg kurikulumu usklađenog sa Bolonjskim modelom obrazovanja pokazala je neke od pravaca u kojima se profesija razvijala. Zaključno, sve promene u okviru studijskih programa tokom godina obezbeđivale su studentima radne terapije snažnu vezu između teorijskog i praktičnog obrazovanja i rada u zdravstvenim i socijalnim ustanovama.

Ključne riječi: radna terapija; kompetencije radnih terapeuta; Bolonjski model obrazovanja

