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Survey of Occupational Therapists in Michigan

As optometrists, we recognize the role we play in providing vision services, with vision therapy being a particularly important area of optometric practice. In order to maximize the benefits for the public, we sought to investigate what others are doing along the lines of vision therapy by doing a survey of occupational therapists throughout Michigan. Our hope was to gain some insight into what types of services are available, and how we can improve the collaboration between optometrists and occupational therapists to best serve our patients together.

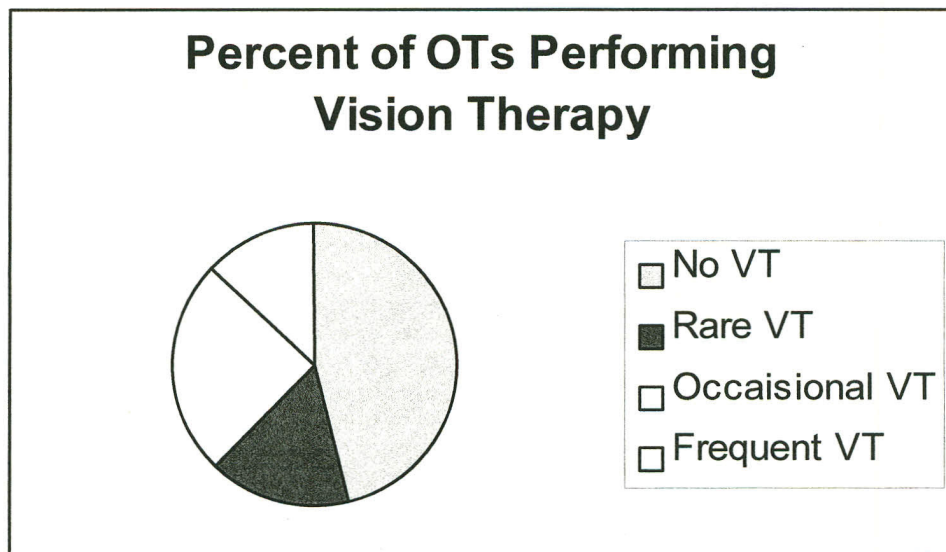
The questionnaire was mailed to 907 occupational therapists (OTs) throughout Michigan who were registered with the Michigan Occupational Therapist Association. Of the 907 that were mailed, 337 (37%) were returned to us and viable for analysis. The survey consisted of 14 short answer/ circle the appropriate response questions (see Appendix A). Please note that often, throughout this paper, multiple answers for survey questions were acceptable, and thus, percentages totaled may not equal 100%.

The first point of interest is educational background of the OTs we surveyed. Of the 337 responders, 32% attended Western Michigan University, 30% attended Eastern Michigan University, and 20% attended Wayne State University. The remaining 18% attended various other colleges throughout Michigan and the United States.

In regards to the amount of education received in visual rehabilitation, a majority of participants (67%) reported that they received no formal education in vision therapy

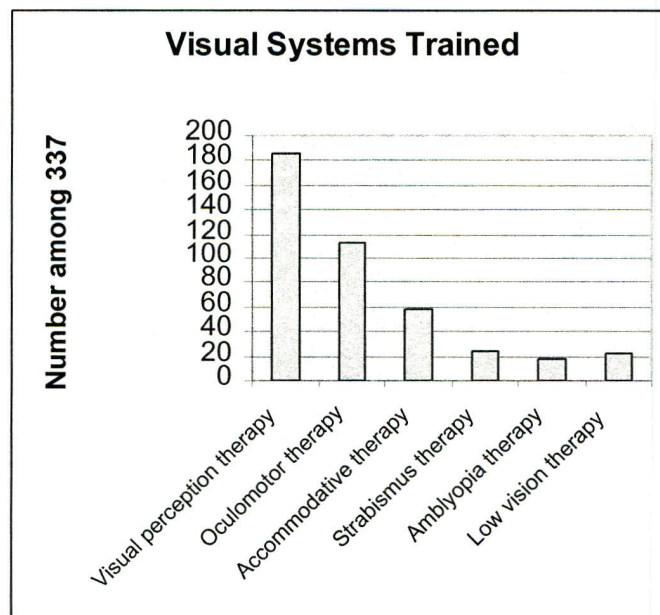
while in school. Of the remaining responses, 18% reported receiving a few class hours of instruction, 12% received one semester of instruction, 3% received two semesters, and 4% attended continuing education seminars in vision therapy to gain their knowledge.

We were also interested in the variety of environments in which OTs are practicing. The largest group of respondents, representing 45% of the replies (153 of 337), consists of those occupational therapists who work in a clinical/medical environment. Following that in decreasing order of occurrence are 24% who work in a school, 17% in a home care/nursing home environment, 9% are in private practice, and 6% are employed by community mental health centers. Other areas such as administration and academia were indicated in 10% of responses.



Among those surveyed, 45% reported that they performed no vision therapy whatsoever. Of the 55% who do perform vision therapy, 29% did so rarely, 17% did so occasionally, and 9% frequently administered vision therapy to patients. In regards to

whether the therapists were comfortable providing visual therapy to patients, 47% replied that they were not comfortable, 41% were moderately comfortable, and 12% were completely comfortable. Many of the surveys indicated that comfort level was related to education level; many occupational therapists believed that an increase in education in school or afterward would likely increase comfort. When asked if they would be interested in a vision therapy workshop we got many positive responses and 67% said they would be interested.



Upon knowing that 55% of OTs surveyed perform vision therapy, we were curious as to which systems occupational therapists trained, what types of patients they treated, and what tools they used to determine a patient's needs. The answers to these questions varied greatly. We found that 55% provided visual perception therapy, 34% provided oculomotor therapy, and 17% provided accommodative therapy. A smaller

number reported providing therapy for strabismics (7%), amblyopes (5%), and low vision patients (7%).

The Visual-Motor Integration test (VMI) was the most commonly reported diagnostic tool, used by 40% of respondents. Other popular methods included observation (8%), the Motor Free Visual Perception Test (8%), Test of Visual Perceptual Skills (3%), and the Developmental Test of Visual Perception-2 (3%). There were a variety of other devices mentioned infrequently.

When asked about the patient population being served, the surveyed occupational therapists reported treating patients suffering from a traumatic brain injury or stroke most commonly (42%). Other answers included working with children (24%), low vision patients (23%), and geriatric patients in general (4%).

Among the occupational therapists with some experience in vision therapy, most found it to be a successful experience. Only 7% felt it was not a successful undertaking. Twenty percent of surveyed OTs rated vision therapy as mildly successful, while a majority (61%) rated vision therapy as moderately successful and 12% considered it extremely successful.

Our study also found satisfaction among OTs who had a relationship with other vision professionals. Roughly one-third of respondents reported they had a working relationship with another vision professional such as an ophthalmologist, optometrist, rehabilitation specialist, or low vision specialist. Most often, that relationship was with an optometrist and the experience was rated as extremely successful. Our study showed that patients are often referred to optometrists by occupational therapists, however patients are rarely referred to OTs by optometrists.

This last statistic represents one area where we feel optometrists can improve themselves. While our survey suggests that majority of OTs do not appear to be doing vision therapy, some occupational therapists do have an interest in visual rehabilitation. It is our belief that a better working relationship between occupational therapists and optometrists can benefit patients, as well as practitioners. Maximizing each profession's strengths, and finding a proper referral for an area of weakness, will provide different perspectives and backgrounds with which to address a patient's visual needs.

Please circle all appropriate responses

1. As part of your occupational therapy program, do you/did you receive any formal visual rehabilitation education?

no
yes

If yes, how much?

One semester Two semesters Other

2. Where did you receive your degree in occupational therapy?

3. What environment do you work in?

School system
Clinic/Medical practice
Private practice
Other:

4. Do you provide visual rehabilitation to your clients?

no
yes

If yes, how often?

Rarely Occasionally Frequently

5. Do you or would you feel comfortable providing visual rehabilitation services?

no
yes

If yes, how comfortable are you?

Moderately comfortable Completely comfortable

6. If you do provide visual rehabilitation services, which visual systems do you/have you trained?

Oculomotor therapy (eye movements)
Accommodative therapy (focusing system)
Strabismus (eye turn)
Amblyopia ("lazy" eye)
Visual perception therapy
Other:

7. For what types of patients do you provide visual rehabilitation services (circle all that apply)?

Children
Traumatic Brain Injury
Low Vision Clients
Other:

8. In your experiences, have you found visual rehabilitation to be successful?

no
yes

If yes, how successful?

Mildly successful Moderately successful Extremely successful

9. Do you identify or diagnose visual system dysfunctions?

no
yes

If yes, how often?

Rarely Occasionally Frequently

If yes, what tests or tools do you use in diagnostically assessing an ocular or visual problem?

Perceptual testing (Technical name for VMI)

Developmental Eye Movements Test (DEM)

Other:

10. Have you ever worked in cooperation with a vision professional in providing visual rehabilitation?

no
yes

11. Which vision professionals have you worked with?

Ophthalmologists

Optometrist

Visual Rehabilitation Specialists

Low Vision Specialist

12. Would you describe those cooperative experiences as successful?

no
yes

If yes, how successful?

Mildly successful Moderately successful Extremely successful

13. Do you have a fairly consistent referral system/relationship with an optometrist?

no
yes

If yes, what percent of your clients are referred to you by an optometrist? _____

What percent do you refer to an optometrist? _____

At what point do you consider a referral?

14. Would you be interested in a workshop with an optometrist focusing on visual rehabilitation?

no
yes

If yes, please leave your name, address, and/or e-mail address.

Thank you for completing this survey.

