Abstract

Title: Verifying and measuring the ability to perform activities of daily living (ADL). A critical examination of ADL instruments and the practice of occupational therapy.

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The aim of the present thesis is to study how the ability to perform activities can be verified and measured. The analyses have been performed from the point of view of occupational therapy. One view that occupational therapists in general often put forward implies that the ability to perform activities consists in the relation between what the individual desires/wants to do and what he/she can do, and that the demand on capacity varies from situation to situation. It is emphasized that the different activities vary in importance according to how the individual chooses to form his/her life. This means that the ability to perform activities is regarded as a multidimensional and relative concept. Occupational therapists make assessments of ADL ability in two different ways, one non-formalised, the other formalised. The latter involves the use of some form of standardised instrument. The ADL instruments have mainly been developed outside the practice of occupational therapy and form research purposes. Both these forms of assessment have been studied in an attempt to answer the question whether the introduction of standardised ADL instruments in occupational therapy may facilitate clinical decisions about the rehabilitation needs and about continued care and evaluation.

The survey of the traditional measuring instruments used has shown that no uniform method of measuring ADL exists. The instruments have mainly been constructed on the basis of a concept applied in practice. Consequently, ADL ability is defined by what is measured by the instrument used. Most of the instruments focus on what the individual does or can do without help from anyone else. It is clearly evident that efforts are also made to measure the activity as a single, uniform ability that can be summarised as a value, i.e. one-dimensionally. The studies show that the traditional instruments mobility level. It is difficult to attain one-dimensionality even if one investigates basal and equivalent activities. The various activities appear to differ in their essentials and demand different abilities.

In a study of occupational therapists in their everyday practice it was found that occupational therapists used a number of dimensions when making decisions about the patients` ability. It was also shown that assessments were made for different purposes and there was a lack of a precise language in which to express the patients` ability.

The most important conclusion must be that it is a myth that occupational therapists should be able to use a uniform instrument for all ADL assessment. Formalised instruments can be useful when making decisions about future care requirements on the grounds of functional impediments. As guides in the direct contact with an individual patient, the scale
constructions are inadequate, being far too abstract. In order to obtain as reliable measurements as possible, one should avoid index constructions and measure each activity separately. The thesis was concluded with various attempts to construct linguistic expressions to describe the ability to perform activities with greater exactness and in more detail than is possible with the traditional instruments and in current practice.