

**Advancing Acute Care Occupational Therapy Through Research Partnerships**

**Author: Rebecca Ozelie, DHS, OTR/L, FAOTA**

The integration of academic knowledge and clinical experience is fundamental to the evolution of evidence-based practices in the advancement of occupational therapy and acute care. Collaboration between academicians and practitioners in acute care settings can significantly enhance research efforts, ultimately promoting improved patient outcomes. This partnership fosters a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding occupational therapy practices, particularly in high-stakes environments like the acute care environment. This synergy of academicians and practitioners is often referred to as “knowledge co-production” in the literature (McCabe, et al. 2021). Knowledge co-production aims to capitalize on the differences between academics and practitioners by adopting a comprehensive approach to complex, multi-dimensional problems that are too intricate for either group to tackle alone (Pettigrew, 2003; Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006).

**Benefits of Collaboration Between Academia and Practice**

One of the primary benefits of such collaboration is the blending of theoretical and practical perspectives. Academicians often have a deep understanding of occupational therapy theories, methodologies, and the latest research trends. Practitioners, on the other hand, possess firsthand knowledge of patient care experiences and the challenges faced in acute settings. This duality can lead to more

relevant research questions that address real-world issues in occupational therapy. By identifying and investigating practical problems, researchers can generate findings that are immediately applicable to clinical practice, thereby enhancing patient care in acute environments where timely and effective interventions are crucial. Collaborative research endeavors can also drive innovation in occupational therapy by combining resources and expertise. Academicians may have access to research funding, institutional support, and advanced analytical tools, while practitioners may provide valuable insights into patient populations and outcomes that are not always captured in academic settings. This synergy allows for comprehensive studies that reflect the complexities of patient care, paving the way for novel interventions that can be tested within clinical environments.

In addition to knowledge exchange, collaboration encourages professional development for both parties. Practitioners engaged in research gain a deeper understanding of scientific inquiry and methodology, enhancing their clinical skills and enabling them to implement evidence-based practices in their work. Conversely, academicians can learn from practitioners about the practical challenges and nuances of patient care, facilitating the development of more applicable research pursuits. This bidirectional flow of knowledge enriches both academic programs and clinical practices.

Lastly, collaboration in research fosters a culture of teamwork and shared responsibility, essential qualities for effective occupational therapy. Engaging in joint projects cultivates professional relationships, encourages networking, and promotes interdisciplinary communication, all of which are critical for successful outcomes in healthcare. Such collegiality not only improves research quality but also generates a

shared commitment to advancing the field, ultimately benefiting students, practitioners, and patients.

### **Strategies for Successful Collaboration**

Establishing effective partnerships between academicians and practitioners in occupational therapy research requires thoughtful planning, open communication, and a shared commitment to common goals. By fostering a collaborative environment, both parties can leverage their unique perspectives to create meaningful research outcomes that directly impact acute care settings. Below are strategies to facilitate successful collaborations in occupational therapy research.

- ***Develop Clear Research Objectives:*** The foundation of any successful collaboration should be a clearly defined set of research objectives. Both parties should work together to articulate the research question, ensuring it addresses a relevant issue in acute care settings. By aligning their goals, academicians and practitioners can ensure that their research efforts are cohesive and directed towards producing meaningful outcomes that both parties agree upon.
- ***Establish Regular Communication Channels:*** Effective communication is vital in any partnership. Setting up regular meetings and utilizing collaborative platforms for discussions and document sharing can enhance communication and foster transparency. Establishing a routine for research meetings ensures all parties remain informed and engaged throughout the research process. The research team might use platforms like Microsoft Teams, Google Drive or BOX so that they can collaboratively work on documents in real time.

- ***Foster a Culture of Respect, Trust and Accountability:*** Mutual respect, trust and accountability are critical in collaborative relationships. Acknowledgment of each other's expertise and valuing contributions from different perspectives fosters a positive research environment. Examples of this are found in a study done by McCabe and colleagues (2021), who highlight purposely building relationships prior to the project by volunteering at the partner organization, removing hierarchies by utilizing anonymous voting processes, providing ample discussion time prior to collective decision making and acknowledgement of tensions.
- ***Leverage Institutional Support:*** Institutions may provide frameworks for collaboration through grants, joint projects, or support for interdisciplinary research centers. Academicians should consider leveraging the academic research requirements of their program and accreditation bodies and determine if students can support the project in any way. Not only would this support the progression of the project but would be a remarkable opportunity for students to engage in authentic research.

### **Example of Successful Collaboration**

There have been examples of successful academic and practitioner collaborations from this very journal, both qualitative and quantitative (Bolin et al., 2024; Ozelie et al., 2024). One example of a successful partnership is the study "De-mystifying General Medicine: A Descriptive Analysis of Occupational Therapy and General Medicine" (Ozelie et al., 2024). This study took place in an academic medical center. Leadership from both the academic and practitioner sides of the medical center

identified a critical topic of need, which laid the foundation for the study. An academician and a practitioner were purposefully chosen to leverage their distinct areas of expertise, with the practitioner leading the medical record review due to her proficiency with the electronic medical records (EMR) system, and the academician overseeing data analysis due to her expertise in research methods. Additionally, a team of occupational therapy doctoral students, as part of their research sequence, actively contributed to the project, providing support in study design and data collection. Regular collaborative meetings ensured the team remained aligned in their objectives and strategy. This interdisciplinary approach not only strengthened the study's rigor but also enhanced the practical relevance of its findings, showcasing the power of joint academic-practitioner initiatives in advancing evidence-based practice.

## References

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### **Author Biography**

Rebecca Ozelie, DHS, ORT/L, is the Chair and Program Director, an Associate Professor at RUSH University in Chicago, IL. Dr. Ozelie is actively involved in research and teaching with a focus on physical disabilities, innovative teaching methodologies, and accommodations and inclusive education.

### **Contact Information**

rebecca\_ozelie@rush.edu