International Assistive Technology Service Case Report: Outcomes of a Romanian and Huntington University Collaboration

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INTRODUCTION

- Internationally, individuals living with disabilities are marginalized by the lack of mobility related assistive technology.
- Insufficient mobility devices impede individuals with disabilities and their caregiver’s ability to participate within the community.
- Without access to a wheelchair for sufficient mobility, they and their caregivers are left at an economic and social disadvantage.
- Under the supervision of licensed therapists, students provided 137 seating and mobility evaluations and devices to individuals with disabilities residing in Romania.

PURPOSE

This paper describes a case study of Huntington University’s Occupational Therapy Doctoral Program as it provides collaborative and culturally appropriate assistive technology interventions as an example for future practice.

BACKGROUND

- The World Health Organization (WHO) projects that globally one billion people are living with a disability.
- Disability prevalence continues to be on the rise due to population ageing and the increase of chronic health conditions.
- 70 million individuals need a wheelchair, with only 5-15% obtaining access to one.
- WHO identified a shortage of healthcare personnel equipped with the knowledge and skills to provide wheelchairs that meet individual’s specific mobility needs.
- Lack of mobility can lead to limited engagement in meaningful activities and community mobility.

METHODOLOGY

Participants:
- licensed occupational therapists and students provided seating and mobility services to individuals with disabilities residing in Romania.
- Occupational therapy students who attended the trip were asked to fill out a post trip survey.

Interventions

Interventions for the event included a seating assessment, fitting, and training to the client or family members on how best to utilize the mobility device. Each intervention varied in length due to complexity of each client, ranging from one hour to five hours of time spent with each client. In total, the team provided 137 custom seating and mobility devices.

Instrumentation

To gather data regarding the impact of the service trip, students were asked to fill out a free-response question survey about their trip experience. Survey transcripts were analyzed using a four-step procedure: 1) removal of identifying information, 2) survey responses were iteratively reviewed while highlighting pertinent information and key words, 3) common themes were identified, 4) comparison of all interview transcripts.

Free-response question survey to occupational therapy students:
1. How would you describe your service trip experience in Romania?
2. How was your clinical expertise as a future OT impacted by the trip?

RESULTS

Qualitative data revealed three major findings and implications for future assistive technology programs and clinical practice and exhibits a potential important model to expand assistive technology practice worldwide.

Emerging themes
1) Life-changing experience
2) Improved ability in providing culturally competent care
3) Impactful to future clinical practice.

DISCUSSION

- Intercultural programs in AT direct impact on clients and clinical instruction in assistive technology.
- Improving future clinical practice and competence working with clients globally.
- Innovative and inexpensive way to assist individuals with disabilities and provide services to countries with limited access to materials and assistive technology.

CONCLUSION

University’s should be encouraged to adopt and continue to operate programs such as this. Collaborations such as these are a promising way to advance the field of assistive technology, and the services highlight the role current and future practitioners can play in collaborative international programming. There is a continued need for innovative models for service delivery as the global implementation of assistive technology continues to improve.

REFERENCES


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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
<th>Interview Quotes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Life-changing experience</td>
<td>Participant F: “Serving people in Romania was a humbling experience. Living in America, I believe we often forget how fortunate we are to have a vast array of resources at our fingertips…Simply put, seeing how under-served those of Romania are has inspired me to use the resources I am able to offer for a greater good; what may be readily available and expected to us, could be significant and invaluable to someone else.”</td>
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<td>Theme 2: Improved ability to provide culturally competent care</td>
<td>Participant A: “The clinical knowledge I gained while in Romania focused on seating systems to improve functional mobility in the community and to complete activities of daily living. This knowledge I have already been able to use during a level II rotation in a nursing home while working with ATPs during wheelchair assessments.”</td>
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<td>Theme 3: Impactful to future clinical practice</td>
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Example Interview Quotes

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