

4 CHAPTER

GUIDING THERAPIST DECISIONS FOR MEASURING OUTCOMES IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

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The process of deciding how to measure occupational performance is challenging to occupational therapists for several reasons. First, while it is common for therapists in their educational programs to learn to administer many different assessments, it is less common for assessment to be learned as part of an overall measurement approach. Placing the use of assessments within a person, occupation, and environment measurement framework helps to organize our thinking about how we use measurement in practice. Second, therapists often have difficulty deciding what specific attribute(s) to measure. For example, a client has identified that he or she wants to be able to go shopping. What are the occupational performance attributes that are important to the occupation of shopping but are causing him or her difficulty—is it moving around a store, managing money, or selecting the groceries? Is the problem in performance related to where he or she will shop? The area of performance difficulty leads to a decision about the attribute to focus on for measurement. Finally, once a decision has been made about the attribute(s) to measure, what specific assessment tool is the best to use? Considerations of ease of use, time, psychometric characteristics, and cost are central to this decision.

This chapter presents a decision-making process that occupational therapists can use to guide the process of the measurement of occupational performance. We outline the decision-making process, list key questions to ask at each stage of the measurement process, and discuss important issues to consider as part of this process. Reflective questions for therapists to consider are listed for each stage of the measurement process. Although this decision-making process may seem long initially, we have purposefully described it in detail to enable student occupational therapists to learn the measurement process

in a step-by-step fashion. As therapists become more skilled in measurement, they will find that the process flows smoothly from the identification of occupational performance issues to further assessment to intervention and outcome measurement.

Outcome measures selected for client evaluation and decisions should be valid and reliable and able to measure the impacts of the rehabilitation interventions provided to patients. Desirable qualities of these measures include the following:

- Easy for the practitioner to access/apply, and provide minimal inconvenience or discomfort for the clients
- Relevant and applicable across different contexts (clinical conditions/severity, language/literacy, cultures, environments)
- Have clearly defined standardized procedures to allow consistent application and interpretation
- Have the ability to assist with diagnosis/classification, goal-setting, prognosis, treatment planning, discharge planning, and/or measurement of treatment effectiveness for individual clients
- Reflect domains of client's health that may be affected by rehabilitation
- Provide a consistent numeric metric that can accurately quantify treatment effects associated with different interventions
- Have sufficient comparative data to others with similar conditions
- Have strong consistent measurement properties across different client populations and contexts.

Any single outcome measure is unlikely to fulfill all measurement purposes because the measurement