

Perceptions & Intent to Implement Accommodations for OT & PT Practitioners with Disabilities

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Background

Occupational therapy (OT) and physical therapy (PT) professions emphasize inclusion and client-centered care, yet there is limited understanding of how well the profession itself accommodates practitioners with disabilities (**Neal-Boylan et al., 2012; Kontosha et al., 2007**). The Americans with Disabilities Act as Amended (ADAA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act require equitable access in education and employment; however, transitioning students with disabilities from educational settings to clinical practice remains challenging (**Gillies, 2012; GAO, 2024**). While academic institutions are increasingly implementing accommodations for OT/PT students, there is a knowledge gap concerning how employers perceive, understand, and apply workplace accommodations for practicing clinicians with disabilities (**Gewurtz et al., 2016; Dong et al., 2020**). Creighton University, where the number of students with accommodation needs has doubled in the past five years, exemplifies this growing trend (**Heimann, 2024**). The university supports inclusive excellence, but students often face uncertainty when transitioning to the workforce (**Gillies, 2012**). Preliminary literature suggests that employers have limited exposure to accommodation requests and may lack clarity on legal requirements and practical strategies for implementation (**Gewurtz et al., 2016; Dong et al., 2020; Inside Higher Ed, 2024**).

Focused Question

How do employers and managers of OT and PT practitioners understand, perceive, and implement workplace accommodations for clinicians with disabilities?

Barriers to Employment

Despite legislative protections, several barriers persist for healthcare practitioners with disabilities:

- Limited employer awareness: Many employers lack formal training or exposure to disability rights and accommodations in a healthcare workplace.
- Misconceptions about cost and burden: Employers often overestimate the financial and operational costs of accommodations.
- Stigma and bias: Disclosure of a disability may negatively affect hiring decisions and workplace integration.
- Inconsistent implementation: There is variability across clinics regarding how accommodations are assessed and enacted, often depending on subjective interpretations of "reasonable." These barriers contribute to unequal access and missed opportunities for qualified practitioners with disabilities, limiting workforce diversity.

Proposed Research Methods

Sequential explanatory mixed methods design to investigate employer knowledge, perception, and intent to implement accommodations:

•Phase 1 – Quantitative Survey:

- Distributed via Qualtrics to OT/PT clinical partners affiliated with Creighton University
- Focuses on self-reported knowledge, experience with accommodations, and intent to implement.
- Incentivized through \$50 gift card drawing.

•Phase 2 – Qualitative Focus Groups:

- Conducted via Zoom with a subset of survey participants who indicate prior experience with workplace accommodations.
- Aims to deepen understanding of survey trends and explore implementation challenges.
- Participants compensated with a \$50 gift card.

Survey Data will be analyzed using SPSS

- Thematic analysis
- Triangulation will ensure reflection of
 - Measurable trends
 - Contextual insights.

Expected Key Findings

- Employers will report low to moderate levels of knowledge about accommodations,
- Additional difficulty with knowledge on mental health or invisible disabilities.
- Most employers will express a willingness
- Reports of a need for clearer guidance and support.
- Perceived barriers will include uncertainty about legal obligations, lack of resources, and unclear institutional policies.

Findings are expected to highlight a gap between employer willingness and actual implementation capacity, reinforcing the need for targeted education and policy support

Future Directions

Toolkits & Training for disability inclusion in healthcare

Policy & Curriculum for OT/PT student transitions

Collaboration with AOTA/APTA to share best practices

Longitudinal Research on impact and outcomes

Building a more equitable, inclusive rehab workforce

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