

The Impact of Foreign Study Experiences on Occupational Therapists' Work Practices in Singapore

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Abstract

Introduction: Singapore has historically been a country that relies heavily on migrant health workers to fulfil the ageing population's demands on their healthcare system. While the COVID-19 pandemic has served to highlight the contributions and value of foreign-trained and foreign-born healthcare professionals to the resilience of healthcare systems, little is known about their integration into the Singaporean workforce. This qualitative pilot research aims to examine the impact of international study experiences on work practices of foreign-trained occupational therapists in Singapore.

Methods: The experiences of six (6) foreign-trained occupational therapists working in Singapore were collected through semi-structured interviews based on the Kawa Model and thematically analysed.

Results: Three key themes emerged were job culture, client-specific culture, and clinical skills. Each of these three categories encompasses both positive and negative consequences of the foreign study experience.

Conclusion: Though foreign-trained occupational therapists in Singapore encounter complexities adjusting to local practice, their experiences in other contexts allowed them to contribute in ways that local graduates could not. As cultural compatibility is key to facilitating integration, Singaporean hospitals recruiting staff from abroad should focus their efforts on countries with similar culture or healthcare systems to build resilience moving into the New Normal.

Keywords: Occupational therapy, cultural compatibility, foreign healthcare workers, work culture, healthcare systems.