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The Role of Occupational Therapists in the Joint Commission's Disease-Specific Care Certification Process: A Continuing Education Course

Addie E. Broom

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**The Role of Occupational Therapists in the Joint Commission's
Disease-Specific Care Certification Process: a Continuing Education Course**

Addie E. Broom, MHS, OTR/L

The Medical University of South Carolina

Post-Professional Occupational Therapy Doctorate Program

Background

The Joint Commission is a well-established accrediting body for healthcare organizations (The Joint Commission, 2023). Recognition from the Joint Commission ensures adherence to clinical guidelines, while enforcing the highest standard of patient-centered care (The Joint Commission, 2023). Disease-Specific Care Certification (DSCC) from the Joint Commission is designed to evaluate, accredit, and improve healthcare facilities and/or clinical programs seeking certification in a variety of chronic diseases or conditions across the continuum of care (McWilliam-Ross, 2011). With DSCC accreditation comes improvement in quality of care and overall outcomes for specific patient populations (Azmi et al., 2019). Once DSCC is established, the certified program or facility is expected to uphold the Joint Commission standards identified in their accountability framework (Frost et al., 2019). These standards include program management, delivering or facilitating clinical care, supporting self-management, clinical information management, performance measurement, and enforcing education and competency training among patients and staff (McWilliam-Ross, 2011).

Problem Statement

The Joint Commission Disease-Specific Care Certification process is often driven by nursing specialists and administration, however all of the interdisciplinary team members, including OTs, are instrumental in developing, implementing, and maintaining the Joint Commission DSCC (Azmi et al., 2019). Yet, there are no examples of OT-led DSCC processes in the literature. The reasons that OTs are not involved could include the lack of knowledge and education. Once OT practitioners better understand the process, they can facilitate an efficient, effective, and evidence-based monitored certification program because of their skills in research, collaboration, leadership, and clinical practice (Sawada et al., 2023).

Needs Assessment

The purpose of the needs assessment was to gain stakeholder perspectives concerning the Joint Commission and DSCC. The identified stakeholders that had the highest level of interest and influence for the development and sustainability of the capstone project were OTR/Ls and COTAs. Applicable data was gathered through REDCap, which is an anonymous, online survey system, including questions about demographics, Joint Commission objectives, Disease-Specific Care Certification purpose and involvement, the ability to recognize OT's role in DSCC, and the level of interest in learning about these topics. After the survey distribution, the participant responses portrayed the need for continued occupational therapy education with reference to Disease-Specific Care Certification purpose and processes.

The quantitative data incorporates the survey responses of 85 participants (N=85) for the 10 questions displayed in Table 1. The answer options were set as multiple choice radio buttons and used branching logic for questions 3 and 7 to input additional participant responses, if needed. The descriptive statistics reported in the following paragraphs and figures confirm the lack of understanding and involvement with reference to DSCC, along with the decreased ability to recognize OT's role in DSCC.

Table 1: Needs Assessment REDCap Survey Questions

1) What is your age?	6) Have you ever heard of DSCC?
2) How many years of experience do you have as a therapist?	7) Do you understand the purpose of DSCC?
3) What setting do you work in?	8) Have you ever been involved in DSCC?
4) Have you ever heard of the Joint Commission?	9) Are you confident in your ability to recognize OT's role in DSCC?
5) Are you knowledgeable regarding the objectives of the Joint Commission?	10) Would you be interested in learning about the role of OT in DSCC?

Out of the 85 participants, 38 (44.7%) are ages 20-29, 32 (37.6%) are ages 30-39, 11 (12.9%) are ages 40-49, and 4 (4.7%) are ages 50-59. When asked about the number of years experience as a therapist, 35 participants (41.2%) have only 0-4 years of clinical experience, 25 participants (29.4%) have 5-9 years of clinical experience, 17 participants (20%) have 10-19 years of clinical experience, 6 participants (7.1%) have 20-29 years of clinical experience, and only 2 participants (2.4%) have 30+ years of clinical experience. As for work settings, 14 people (16.5%) work in acute care, 12 people (14.1%) work in inpatient rehabilitation, 26 people (30.6%) work in outpatient clinics, 6 people (7.1%) work in skilled nursing facilities, 10 people (11.8%) work in the school setting, 3 people (3.5%) work in home health, and 14 people (16.5%) work in “other” settings not specified by the multiple choice options.

A total of 69 participants (81.2%) had heard of the Joint Commission but only 26 participants (30.6%) were knowledgeable regarding the objectives. Additionally, only 21 participants (24.7%) had ever heard of DSCC. As shown in Figure 1, when prompted about understanding the purpose of DSCC, only 14 participants (16.5%) responded yes, 15 participants (17.6%) responded somewhat, and 56 participants (65.9%) responded no. When asked if the survey participants have ever been involved in DSCC, 7 participants (8.2%) responded yes, 7 participants (8.2%) responded somewhat, and the overwhelming majority of 71 participants (83.5%) responded no, all of which are portrayed in Figure 2. As presented in Figure 3, the question “Are you confident in your ability to recognize OT’s role in DSCC?” produced 7 “yes” responses (8.2%), 17 “somewhat” responses (20%), and 61 “no” responses (71.8%).

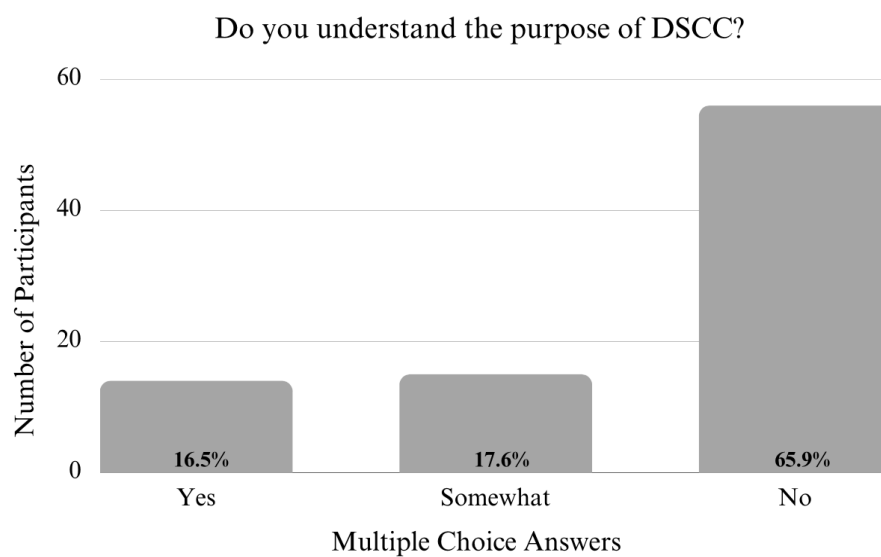
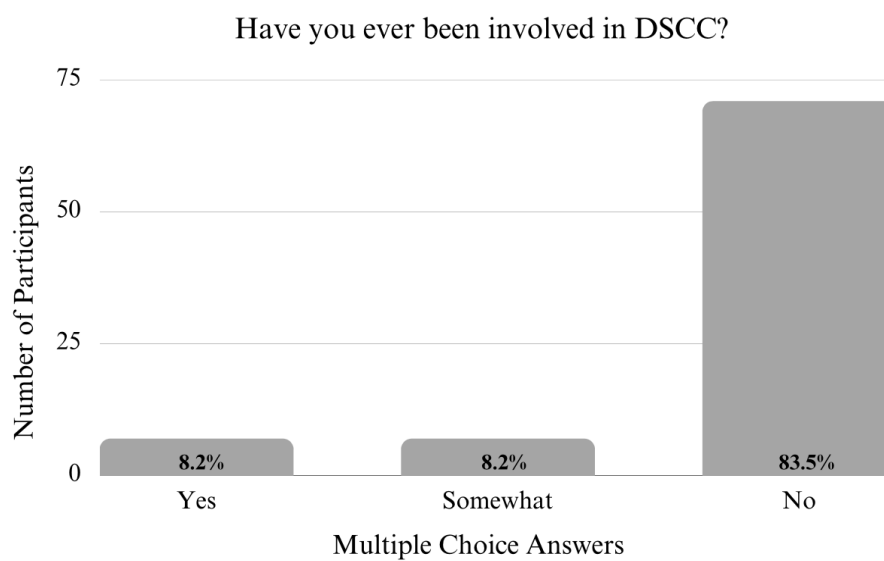
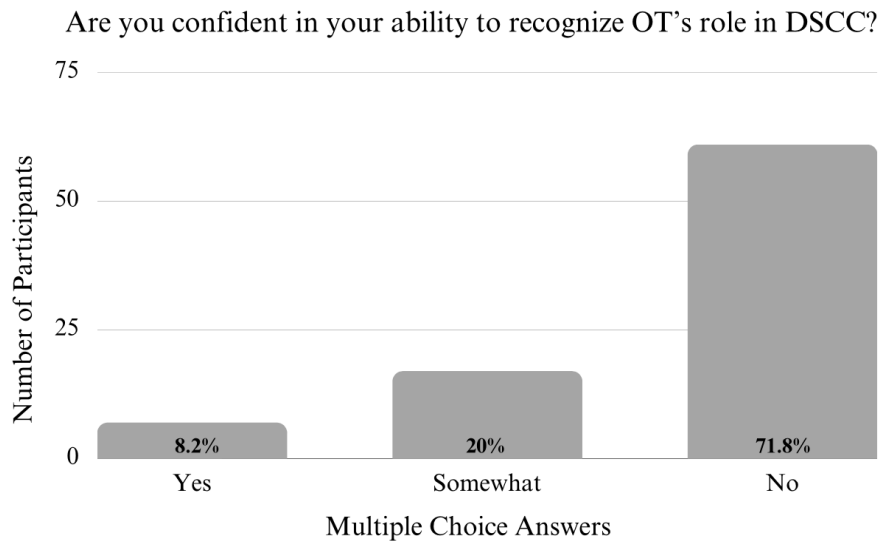
Figure 1: DSCC Purpose**Figure 2: DSCC Involvement**

Figure 3: OT's Role in DSCC

Purpose Statement

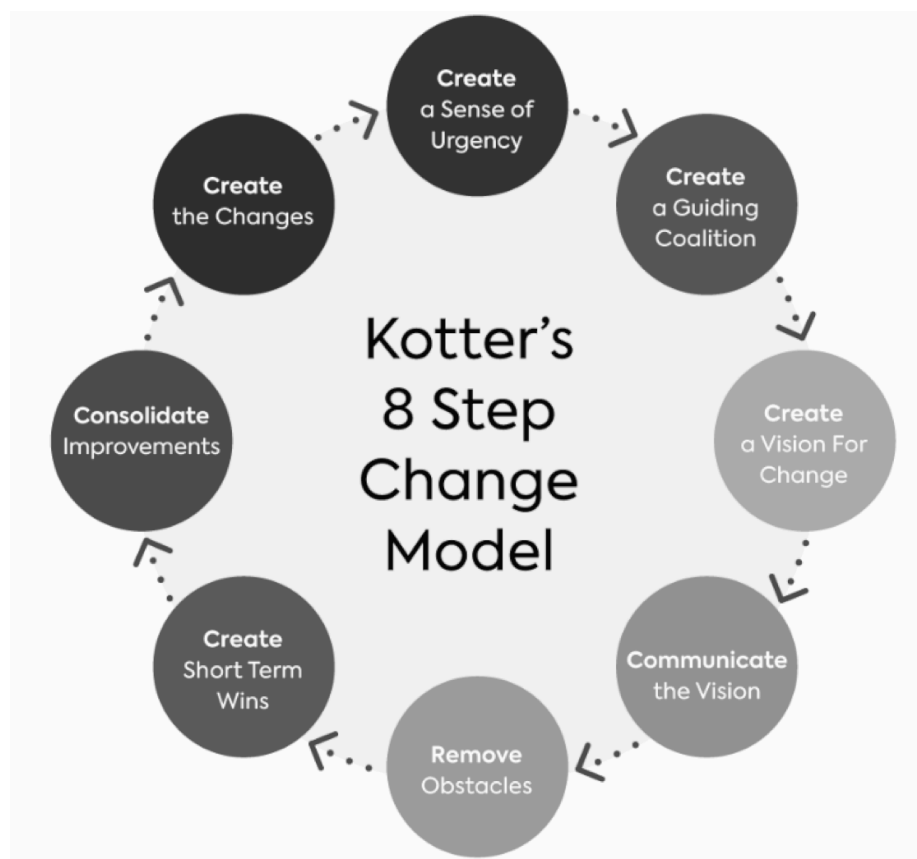
To summarize, both the literature and needs assessment indicate minimal OT understanding and involvement regarding the certification process. The purpose of this quality improvement, capstone project is to promote knowledge amongst OT practitioners about their role in the Joint Commission DSCC process by means of continuing education (CE).

Conceptual Framework

The doctoral capstone project was guided by Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model portrayed in Figure 4. This conceptual framework was chosen because of its effectiveness with change processes (Campbell, 2020). The Model of Change includes creating a sense of urgency, forming powerful guiding coalitions, developing a vision and a strategy, communicating the vision, removing obstacles and empowering employees for action, creating short-term wins, consolidating gains, and strengthening change by anchoring change in the culture (Campbell, 2020). Kotter's structured framework guided the capstone project's methods from beginning to end, while ultimately using the continuing education course to drive professional change.

The continuing education course implemented a sense of urgency by building momentum regarding DSCC. The PowerPoint included the purpose and mission of DSCC, along with tools needed to develop and execute strategies. The mission statement and vision of the Joint Commission's Disease-Specific Care Certification was embedded within the PowerPoint and clearly defined throughout the course. Additionally, intended and unintended obstacles were discussed, along with tactics to empower interdisciplinary team members for action. Lastly, participants were encouraged to take their newfound knowledge from the conference and share it with their organization, in the hopes of implementing and achieving the planned change effort of Disease-Specific Care Certification.

Figure 4: Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model



Methods

The purpose of this quality improvement capstone project was to enhance knowledge amongst occupational therapy practitioners. Achievement of this purpose was made possible by the educational design of a continuing education (CE) course. The capstone project was developed using a single group, pre and post test design. The participants were recruited through the South Carolina Occupational Therapy Association (SCOTA) conference advertisements, such as emails, social media, etc. The convenience sample was composed of OT practitioners, including OTR/Ls and COTAs, that attended the continuing education course at the 2024 SCOTA Annual Conference. These participants volunteered to complete the pre and post instructional surveys.

The continuing education course included a comprehensive PowerPoint, an infographic handout (Appendix A), a 1-hour, in-person lecture, and a pre/post instructional survey. Prior to the presentation, a pre instructional survey was provided. After completion of the survey, the PowerPoint presentation began. The presentation was titled “Professional Growth through the Joint Commission Disease-Specific Care Certification Process” and began by introducing the 5 learning objectives displayed in Table 2. The PowerPoint included Joint Commission and Disease-Specific Care Certification definitions, along with specific Disease-Specific Care Certification benefits, eligibility, performance measures, clinical practice guidelines, competency assessment, credentialing process, etc. Throughout the PowerPoint, the literature that supports the importance of Disease-Specific Care Certification was referenced. Upon completion of the PowerPoint presentation, a post instructional survey was provided to gauge knowledge acquisition from the continuing education course.

Table 2: Learning Objectives

Upon Completion of the CE course, participants will:
1) have increased knowledge regarding the objectives of the Joint Commission
2) better understand the purpose of DSCC
3) be confident in their ability to recognize OT's role in DSCC
4) recognize the professional growth and leadership opportunities provided by DSCC
5) be able to communicate and promote DSCC involvement at their workplace

Timeline

The capstone project implementation occurred primarily during the Spring of 2024, specifically January through March. The continuing education course was presented at the 2024 South Carolina Occupational Therapy Association (SCOTA) Annual Conference on Friday, February 23rd at 3:45-4:45 pm in Columbia, South Carolina. The capstone project was then modified, finalized, and presented to the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) Post-Professional OTD students and professors. Lastly, the capstone project was reformatted and submitted to MEDICA@MUSC, which is the Medical University of South Carolina's institutional repository.

Results

The quantitative data was gathered and measured via a pre and post instructional survey. Before and after the continuing education course, a QR code (linked to a REDCap survey) was provided and the participants were prompted to answer questions that directly correlated to the learning objectives. The answer choices were displayed as multiple choice radio buttons of either yes, somewhat, or no. The rationale for utilization of surveys includes ease of conduction, high response rates, and quick data compilation (Jones, Baxter, & Khanduja, 2013). With each participant's response, the quantitative data was automatically recorded.

The pre continuing education course survey incorporates the responses of 15 participants (N=15) for the 3 questions displayed in Table 3. The responses to question 1 are displayed in Figure 5, the responses to question 2 are displayed in Figure 6, and the responses to question 3 are displayed in Figure 7. Out of the 15 survey participants, 0% responded yes to any of the pre instructional survey questions, thus confirming the lack of knowledge with reference to the Joint Commission, Disease-Specific Care Certification, or OT's role in the certification process.

Table 3: Pre CE Course REDCap Survey Questions

1) Are you knowledgeable regarding the objectives of the Joint Commission?
2) Do you understand the purpose of Disease-Specific Care Certification?
3) Are you confident in your ability to recognize OT's role in Disease-Specific Care Certification?

Figure 5: Joint Commission Objectives

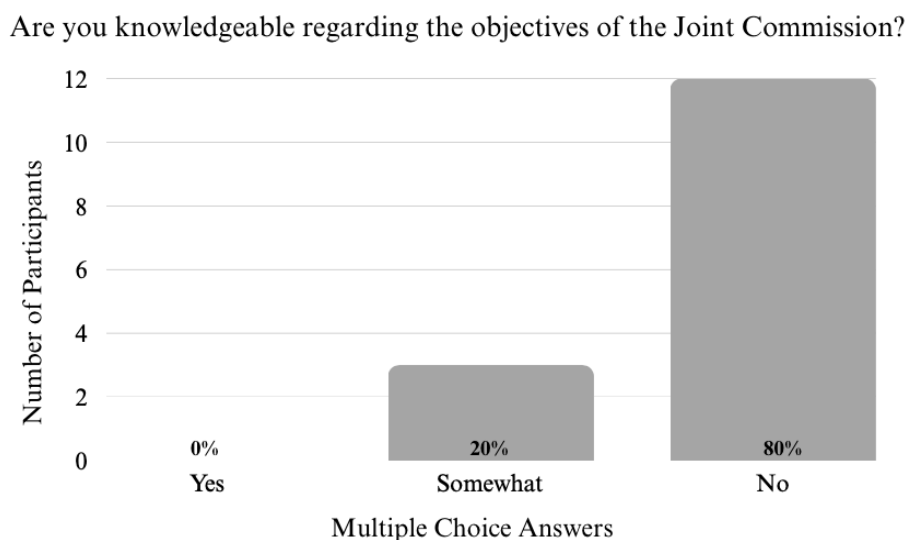
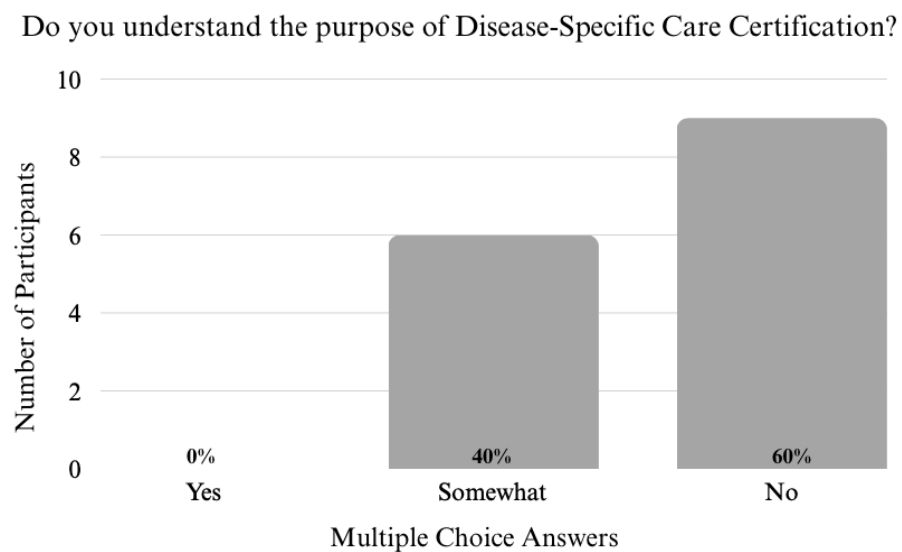
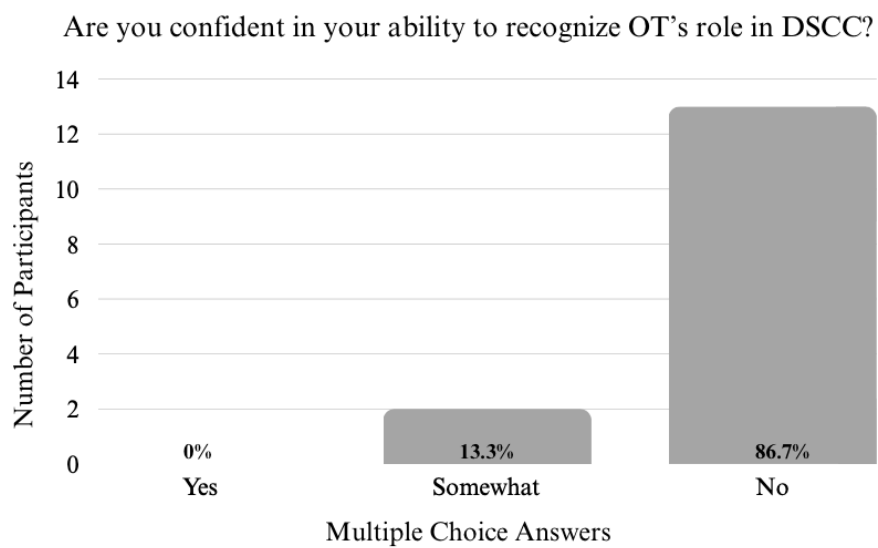


Figure 6: DSCC Purpose**Figure 7: OT's Role in DSCC**

The post continuing education course survey incorporates the responses of 15 participants (N=15) for the 5 questions displayed in Table 4. The responses to question 1 are displayed in Figure 8, the responses to question 2 are displayed in Figure 9, the responses to question 3 are displayed in Figure 10, the responses to question 4 are displayed in Figure 11, and the responses to question 5 are displayed in Figure 12. Out of the 15 survey participants, 0% responded no to any of the post instructional survey questions, thus affirming the continuing education course as an effective educational tool.

Table 4: Post CE Course REDCap Survey Questions

1) Are you knowledgeable regarding the objectives of the Joint Commission?
2) Do you understand the purpose of Disease-Specific Care Certification?
3) Are you confident in your ability to recognize OT's role in Disease-Specific Care Certification?
4) Are you interested in facilitating the DSCC program at your respective organization?
5) Do you think professional growth may be a result of pursuing DSCC?

Figure 8: Joint Commission Objectives

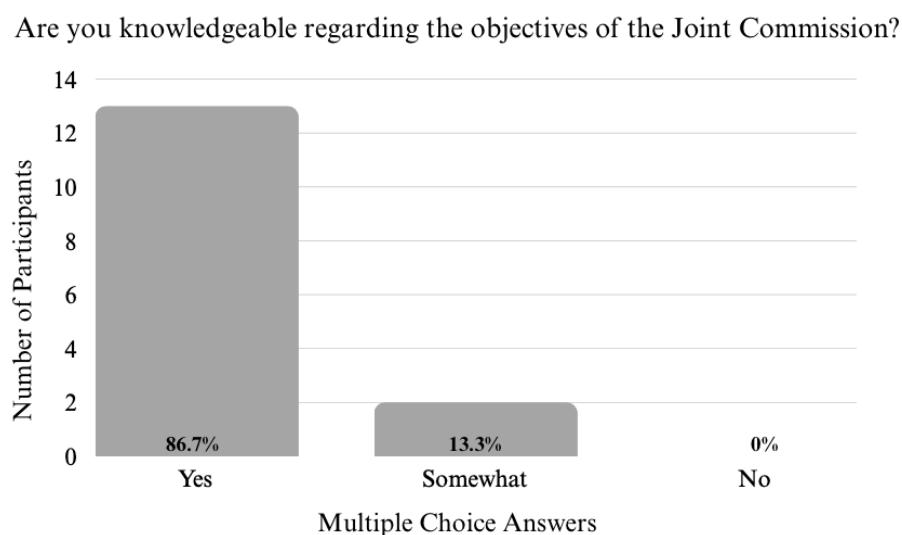


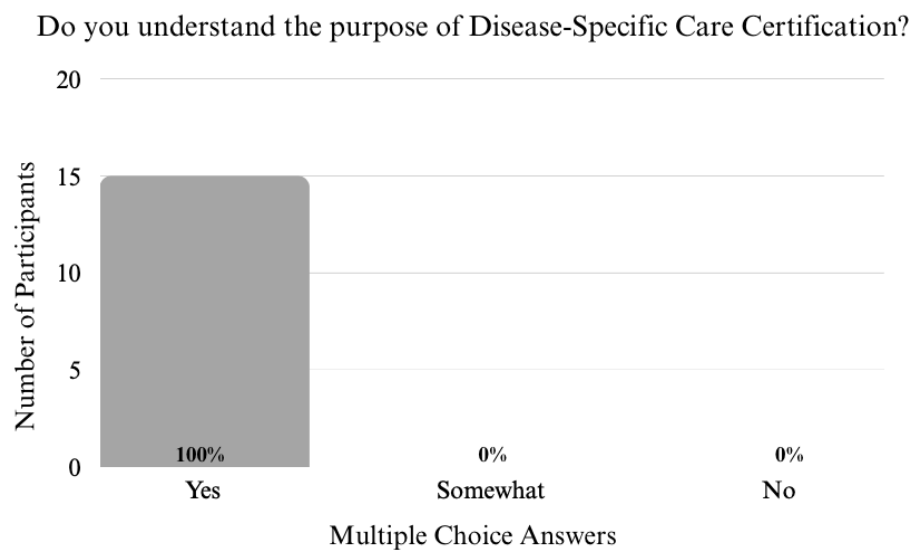
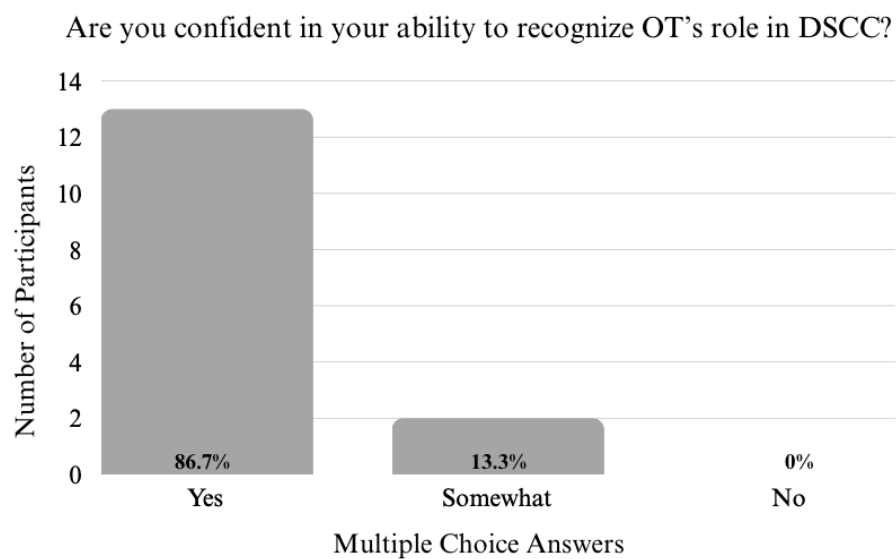
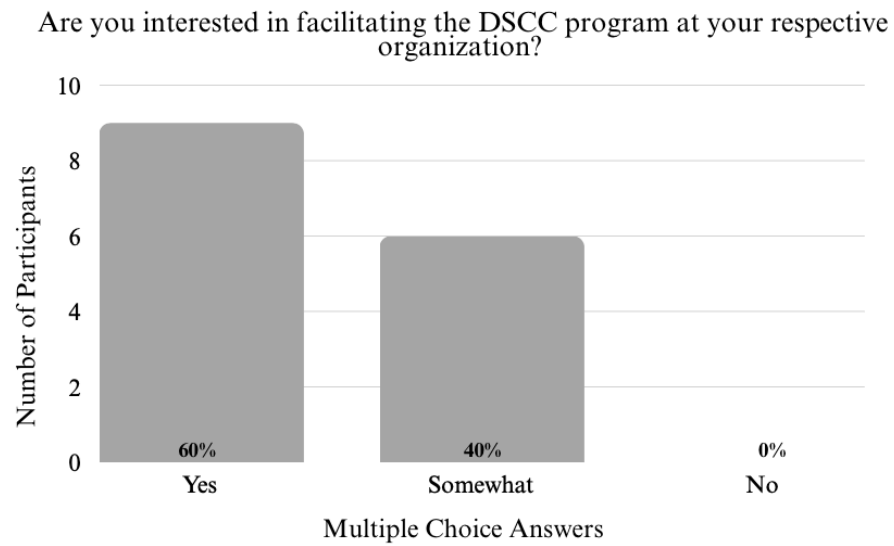
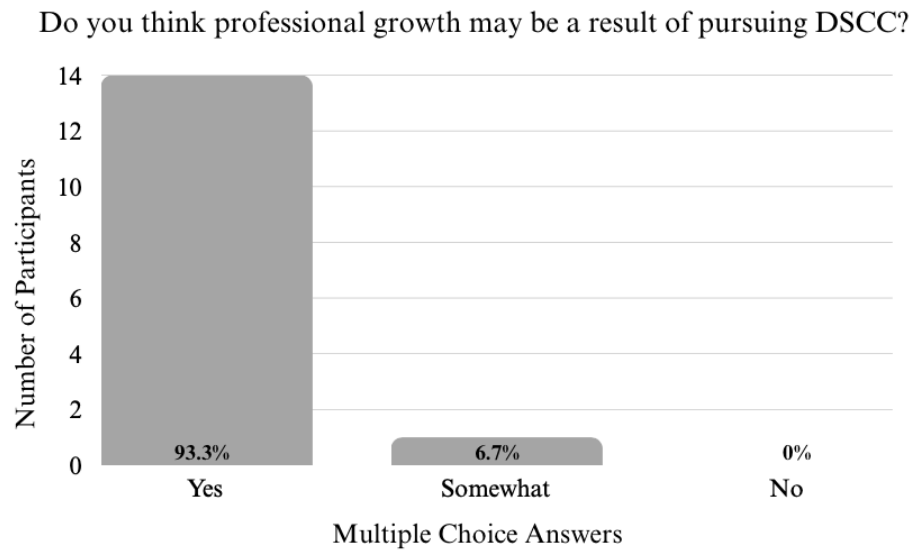
Figure 9: DSCC Purpose**Figure 10: OT's Role in DSCC**

Figure 11: DSCC Interest**Figure 12: Professional Growth**

The participant responses of the pre continuing education course survey were compared and contrasted to the participant responses of the post continuing education course survey. The knowledge change and learning achievement as a result of the comprehensive PowerPoint, infographic handout (Appendix A), and 1-hour, in-person lecture were the variables being measured via REDCap surveys. The participant-reported outcome measures directly relate to the capstone project's purpose by addressing the original needs assessment and proving the continuing education course useful in regard to increased knowledge surrounding the Joint Commission's Disease-Specific Care Certification and the role of occupational therapy practitioners throughout the certification process.

Limitations

Similar to most quality improvement ventures, the capstone project is subject to several limitations, despite the promising data and results. It is significant to note that the continuing education course participants included both experienced & entry level occupational therapy practitioners, however, due to the small sample size of only 15 people, it is probable that the survey participants are not generalizable to the population at large. Additionally, there is limited data due to the material only being presented once at the 2024 South Carolina Occupational Therapy Association (SCOTA) annual conference. Selection bias and convenience sampling were present during the conference due to the narrowed geographic scope of occupational therapy practitioners within South Carolina and the finite timing of only one weekend. Lastly, the absence of a free text option within the pre and post instructional surveys eliminated the potential for any qualitative data collection. Further research is needed to establish an unambiguous correlation between Disease-Specific Care Certification education and leadership opportunities for occupational therapy clinicians.

Discussion

After analyzing the data collected from the pre and post continuing education course surveys, the results demonstrate a significant change in participant knowledge. Thus, the results indicate that continuing education is crucial for occupational therapy practitioners to understand their role in the Joint Commission Disease-Specific Care Certification process. These results should be taken into account when considering how to implement continuing education regarding awareness, knowledge development, and confidence surrounding certification. Included in the post survey was a question about the participant's interest in pursuing DSCC, in which 60% responded yes and 40% responded somewhat. These are encouraging responses, as there is great potential for future avenues of further research on the topic, which allows for continued growth and viability of the occupational therapy profession. Regarding the sustainability of the capstone project, the future plan is to apply for a poster presentation at the AOTA conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on April 3-5th, 2025.

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Appendix A

CE Course Infographic

Professional Growth through the Joint Commission Disease-Specific Care Certification Process



The Joint Commission is a well-established accrediting body for healthcare organizations. Recognition from the Joint Commission ensures adherence to clinical guidelines, while enforcing the highest standard of patient-centered care.

Disease-Specific Care Certification (DSCC) from the Joint Commission is designed to evaluate, accredit, & improve healthcare facilities &/or clinical programs seeking certification in a variety of chronic diseases or conditions across the continuum of care.

DSCC ensures your program/organization meets clinical performance standards for targeted metrics as well as other compliance standards. DSCC strives to:



Engaging with a national entity, such as the Joint Commission, allows for professional growth, leadership opportunities, & corporate recognition.

<https://www.jointcommission.org>



Presented by: Addie E. Broom, MHS, OTR/L

Appendix B

CE Course Abstract

Proposal for 2024 Annual Conference Course Presentation

Please email this completed application to scotavicepresident@gmail.com no later than October 12, 2023. Presentations must be evidence-based, relative to the practice of occupational therapy, and a minimum of 1-hour in length and a maximum of 2-hours. This is an in-person conference scheduled February 23-24, 2024 in Columbia, SC.

Primary Presenter's Name and Credentials: Addie E. Broom, MHS, OTR/L

Primary Presenter's Email: broomaddie@gmail.com

Phone Number: (980) 875-1986

Course Title: Professional Growth through the Joint Commission's Disease-Specific Care Certification Process

Number of Contact Hours: 1-hour

Course Abstract:

Disease-Specific Care Certification (DSCC) from the Joint Commission is designed to evaluate, accredit, and improve healthcare facilities and/or clinical programs seeking certification in a variety of chronic diseases or conditions across the continuum of care. The Joint Commission DSCC process is often driven by nursing specialists and administration. Unfortunately, occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs) are usually not involved due to a lack of knowledge about the process. Once OTPs better understand the DSCC procedures, they can facilitate an efficient, effective, and evidence-based monitored certification program because of their skills in research, collaboration, leadership, and clinical practice. Engaging with a national entity, such as the Joint Commission, allows for professional growth, leadership opportunities, and corporate recognition. Because there is minimal OTP understanding and participation regarding the certification process, the purpose of this presentation is to promote awareness amongst OTPs about their important role in the Joint Commission DSCC process.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of the CE course, participants will...

- 1) have increased knowledge regarding the objectives of the Joint Commission.
- 2) better understand the purpose of DSCC.
- 3) be confident in their ability to recognize OT's role in DSCC.
- 4) recognize the professional growth and leadership opportunities provided by DSCC.
- 5) be able to communicate and promote DSCC involvement at their workplace.