

ACOTUP Researcher Profile

Name of researcher: Mary Egan, University of Ottawa

Degrees and professional qualifications (including fellowships):

PhD (Epidemiology and Biostatistics); MSc (OT); BSc (OT)

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Area of research: Personally valued activities; Connection with health and well-being; Evidence-based and theoretically defensible occupational therapy; Spiritual issues in occupational therapy and; Coordination of care.

Research related awards and honors:

- Golden Quill Award, CJOT (2011)
- Barbara Sexton Lectureship Award, Western University (2011)
- Muriel Driver Memorial Lecture Award (2007)
- A CAOT Fellowship (2007)

Grants/funding history: In the last 7 years, Professor Egan has received 22 grants as a primary investigator or co-investigator. Of these, 11 have been from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and 5 have been from provincial and national stroke research organizations. Her grants include:

- PI M. Egan. (2013). Seniors, risk and successful aging; towards a broader understanding for rehabilitation. Canadian Institutes of Health Research.
- PI W. Gifford. (2013). A systematic review of managerial leadership for research use in nursing and allied healthcare professions. Canadian Institutes of Health Research.
- PI D. Kessler. (2013). OPC-Stroke: A stroke-focused metacognitive intervention. University of Ottawa Brain and Mind Institute.
- PI P. Stolee, K. Berg, B. Chesworth and M. Egan. (2008-13). Emerging Team Grant: InfoRehab: Enhancing MSK Rehabilitation through Better Use of Health Information. Canadian Institutes of Health Research.
- PI D. Kessler. (2011). Peer Support for Stroke Survivors: A Pilot Evaluation. Ontario Stroke System.
- (2009-11). Engaging in valued activities post-stroke – long term care. Ontario Stroke System.
- (2008-10). Engaging in valued activities post-stroke. Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario.

Research collaboration: I am very fortunate to have many valuable research collaborations. One of the most important has been with my UOttawa colleague, Professor Claire-Jehanne Dubouloz. I was intrigued by the originality of Dr Dubouloz's research and extremely impressed with the rigour of her work and her broad and deep understanding of qualitative methods. I invited her to participate on an on-line learning action research grant several years ago and really enjoyed working with her. I have been lucky enough to work with her on a number of grants and a number of student projects since. Working with her has really helped me stretch methodologically and it's been great fun.

What is the most important thing in mentoring graduate students? Mentoring research students is definitely the thing I enjoy most about my job. I have been extremely fortunate to have excellent students from the entry-to-practice masters and "programme court" (short masters program for students who hold a bachelors degree in OT) at UOttawa, the PhD in Rehabilitation Sciences at UOttawa and the master's program at Dalhousie University. I don't mean to be facetious, but the one thing I have learned is "agree to supervise only excellent students". A related piece of advice is "remember that they probably don't realize how good they are. Don't hesitate to push them a bit to apply for awards and other opportunities, and don't forget to point out how well they're doing."

Most significant publications: The three publications I am most proud of are:

- Kubina, L. A., Dubouloz, C. J., Davis, C. G., Kessler, D., & Egan, M. Y. (2013). The process of re-engagement in personally valued activities during the two years following stroke. Disability and Rehabilitation, 35(3), 236-243.
As part of a larger cohort study, this grounded theory project demonstrates the importance of social connection and risk in re-engagement in personally valued occupations. It also challenges many of our assumptions about stroke rehabilitation.
- Egan, M.Y., Kubina, L. A., Lidstone, R. I., Macdougall, G. H., & Raudoy, A. E. (2010). A critical reflection on occupational therapy within one Assertive Community Treatment team. Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 77(2), 70-79.
This project was developed by a super team at the Royal Ottawa Hospital who really wanted to live the Occupational Performance Process and help advance how best to enable occupation. Guided by "Zero" and "M", a generous patient and therapist, we learned that difficulties providing occupation-focused and client-centred care are not just a result of the dominance of the medical model.
- Egan, M. (2007). Muriel Driver Memorial Lecture-Speaking of suffering and occupational therapy. Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 74(4), 293-302.
Ten years of clinical questions and mistakes and one year of reflection on the work of Arthur Frank and Emmanuel Levinas.

Tips would you give for new investigators: Some things I have learned working with super researchers that I wish I had known when I was starting out:

Don't feel guilty about blocking out time to write grants and papers. It is both your privilege and responsibility to contribute to the knowledge base of occupational therapy. Protect your time however you can. This includes seeking release from other duties, ruthlessly guarding weekly scheduled writing time and delegating tasks to staff and students.

Identify what you really care about. This is your territory for furthering the knowledge base of OT. Write a single grant proposal with sections you can put in or leave out and then edit introduction and a few details (if necessary) and use it to apply widely for PI funding. When you consider working with others as a co-investigator, discuss how your territory will be included in the project.

Speak the language of your audience even as you are trying to change the discussion. Know what's happening on the health policy front and make the connection with your work for your audience.

Be nice to everyone. Many things happen in this work that can negatively colour your impression of people – from peer reviews to methodological or philosophical disagreements. The world of health research is extremely small. Don't isolate yourself.

Be gleeful about rejection letters. They mean you are productive.

Appreciate that everyone falls off the great funding hamster wheel several times. Don't be discouraged by long dry spells. They happen.

Resources/supports/training programs for new investigators: Your network is the cornerstone of your research program, so if there's one piece of advice it's "get out and meet people". As a student, you are likely to get very good advice from the people just ahead of you training-wise – they will have good advice about resources/supports and training programs. This is true for new faculty as well – speak to people recently tenured to find out what resources were most helpful to them. Furthermore, as a new faculty member, your best collaborations may be with others at the same career stage, particularly those whose work is related to your territory but whose background is outside your field. Attend social events. Volunteer for committees with broad membership but limited time commitment. Attend any meeting related to your territory.

Learning about the culture of funding organizations and your workplace is critical. Offer to sit on grant proposal evaluation committees. Serve on tenure and promotion committees as soon as you can.