



The value of occupational therapy and its contribution to adult social service users and their carers

The College of Occupational Therapists (COT) believes that occupational therapists make a difference to the lives of those receiving services from social care agencies and add value to the current reforms within social care. Occupational therapists contribute to the health and wellbeing of the population in promoting self-reliance and resourcefulness, an important contribution taking into account the future demographics of our ageing society and the expectations of those who use services within the social care sector.

Occupational therapists and their support staff have the skills and competencies to assess and contribute to services provided within the social care sector, and in supporting statutory services to meet their obligations

Our values

Occupational therapists are client-centred in their practice and embrace the social model of disability. They play an important role in delivering services that enable service users to:

- Have choice and control
- Live in an environment/ society that is accessible and appropriate to their lifestyle
- Manage their long-term condition and support services
- Have responsive and accessible information and services that are personalised and appropriate to their needs
- Retain maximum dignity and respect
- Have high quality services that are delivered in the most cost effective way possible
- Maintain, restore or create a match, beneficial to the individual, between the abilities of the person, the demands of her/his occupations in the areas of self care, productivity and leisure, and the demands of the environment (Creek 2003)
- Be protected and safe if vulnerable
- Be active citizens

Our commitment

To achieve this, the College will:

- Actively lobby within all UK government administrations on the added value occupational therapists can bring to the outcomes for service users and their carers
- Support transformational changes within the social care sector which provide service users with choice and control (see College of Occupational Therapists' Position Statement on Transforming Community Equipment Services)

- Continue to proactively raise awareness of the contribution that occupational therapists currently make e.g. assessment of service users and carers with complex needs in relation to home environment, providing expert advice, and assessments for equipment and home modifications/adaptations, moving and handling assessments and reducing or minimising the need for care packages
- Proactively raise the profile on the additional contribution that occupational therapists can make e.g. prevention, enablement/re-ablement, expert patient/condition management, plus leading on return to work initiatives
- Seek opportunities to work on projects that provides information on the workforce and evidence base for occupational therapists working in the social care sector

Occupational therapists' commitment

Occupational therapy practitioners will need to:

- Identify key areas where the contribution of occupational therapists has most cost benefit and the greatest impact to the organisation and the service user
- Train and support others to carry out those straight-forward tasks that occupational therapists may have undertaken in the past i.e. assessments of individuals who have non complex needs and tasks that may involve fast tracking of low cost and low cost items of equipment
- Identify the current areas of engagement that can be managed by the service user or their carer/advocate and support them to exercise control and achieve their aspirations and needs. This may involve working with service users who manage self-directed budgets
- Take responsibility to share and disseminate best practice
- Examine current practice and look to improve systems to ensure service users are enabled to have choice and control in the delivery of services
- Work with social care colleagues and the voluntary sector to deliver holistic and personalised services
- Shift the perception that occupational therapists are gatekeepers of services, to one where occupational therapists are seen as providing responsive services that meet the needs of service users'
- Actively inform senior managers of the barriers preventing swift and efficient service delivery
- Find ways to influence at a strategic level
- Provide practice placements for occupational therapy students
- Appoint newly qualified staff and offer professional supervision
- Keep updated and undertake CPD to maintain their registration with HPC
- Be ambassadors and leaders of their profession

Senior managers in social care organisations

Senior managers whether they are a team manager, service manager or other, should support their occupational therapy colleagues to:

- Proactively plan and deliver changes in service delivery that:
 - Promote efficiencies and better ways of working
 - Develop and support changes in practice and systems to reduce backlogs where they exist, including learning from other organisations
- Be open to considering the additional contributions occupational therapists can make to the wider social care agenda such as prevention, employment, and enablement

- Use and encourage the development of evidence based practice to support current practice and business cases for change/development
- Support and encourage research and audit
- Support practice placements for occupational therapy students
- Support career development and workforce planning for occupational therapists
- Work with commissioners to develop and deliver services that reflect the changing need of the local population

Best practice examples:

Occupational therapists can contribute and bring added value to a wide range of services provided by social care agencies and these can include:

- Prevention services (prevention of falls initiatives – home safety checks)
- Care management
- Re-ablement through the use of rehabilitation and provision of environmental and task modification
- Improving confidence to use equipment effectively
- Engaging with the local community thus reducing social exclusion
- Reducing care packages and improving quality of life
- Assessment of service users' and carers' living environment
- Assessment within care homes to ensure residents are engaged with purposeful and meaningful activities
- Leading on return to work initiatives

There is an evidence base to support the effectiveness of occupational therapists in these situations. Occupational therapists can contribute to many other areas of the social care agenda and their contribution is increasingly recognised and encouraged across the adult social care sector.

Below are some examples.

Living in an accessible environment

Maximising an individual's potential to engage in daily activities to promote social inclusion is a key aim for occupational therapists. Their skills in adapting the environment and enabling people to carry out their chosen activities safely in their own homes can reduce dependency and the need for complex and costly care packages or admission to hospital or residential care (Heywood 2007). This will entail assessment and recommendations to secure funding from the appropriate authority and will be dependent upon the type of tenure in which the individual resides (there are UK country differences for these funding streams).

Re-ablement

'Realising the potential' (COT/ADSS 2003) outlined the core skills of occupational therapists and stated that occupational therapists within social care services are in a 'unique position...to respond to individual needs through rehabilitation programmes which focus on improving people's abilities and assisting in engaging in the wider community through purposeful activities or leisure or vocational rehabilitation'.

The result of this engagement enables service users to achieve meaningful lifestyles through use of quality time in leisure, education, or training opportunities. This encourages participation in the wider community thus reducing social isolation and exclusion. Assistance with further education, training opportunities or return to work can assist service users to develop a new career pathway or a return to work providing further opportunities for integration into the wider community.

Reducing care package costs

Occupational therapists who review care packages and use their skills in rehabilitation and re-ablement have reduced dependency on the need for care services. Through this process they have also met service user goals and encouraged greater engagement with the local community.

Background/Statistical information

‘Occupational Therapy enables people to achieve health, well-being and life satisfaction through participation in occupation’ (COT, 2004)

Occupational therapists (OTs) have been part of local authority social services since departments were first set up in the 1970s and remain the only Allied Health Profession to be employed in this setting (Riley 2002). Occupational therapy staff makes up between **1% to 2%** of the social services workforce in the UK and yet they handle between **25% to 40%** of the referrals to social services. Vacancy rates are reducing in many parts of the country with some areas unable to offer newly qualified occupational therapists posts. The table below also takes into account the number of occupational therapy assistants (OTAs) employed.

Current workforce numbers for UK are:

	No of OTs (wte)	No of OTAs (wte)	Reference
England	1,760	2,270	Personal Social Services staff of social services Departments at 30 September 2006, England. The Information Centre. London
Scotland	551	248	2006 Scottish Local Authority Social Work Services statistics
Wales	169	121	Social Care and Health Workforce Group (2005) Local authority occupational therapy workforce survey 2004. London: Social Care and Health Workforce Group

The UK Health Professions Council (HPC) regulates occupational therapists. All practising occupational therapists are required to register with the HPC and must adhere to a professional code of ethics, conduct and standards of practice. CPD is a requirement for re-registration (HPC 2006).

Occupational therapists are educated to BSc honours level (since 1986). In the UK there are 31 Universities offering pre-registration programmes, including a full-time three-year course, part-time four year BSc programme and two-year accelerated courses. Practice placements form a significant part of all programmes, ensuring that assessment of competence to practice is integral to the occupational therapy qualification.

The majority of occupational therapy students are funded via the Strategic Health Authorities Bursaries (in England and Wales). In Scotland students are funded from the Students Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS).

A few full-time students receive local authority funding and a minority (overseas students) are self-funding.

Support workers

In social work services, occupational therapists have a long history of employing support staff as OTAs, social care officers, or community care assistants. OTAs usually carry their own caseloads and are trained and supervised by an occupational therapist to ensure the best possible standards of practice. Those who have the competence will undertake assessments and make recommendations for more complex cases. This skill mix contributes to ensuring efficiency and timely response for service users.

References

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