

Launch of new guidance for occupational therapy staff on delivering effective vocational advice

Care Services Minister Ivan Lewis today welcomed the publication of *Work Matters: Vocational Navigation for Occupational Therapy Staff*. This good practice booklet is designed to help occupational therapy staff recognise the importance of work as an integral part of an individual's recovery, provides information on how to assist patients to take charge of their own return to work and on establishing effective partnerships with other service providers.

The booklet is being launched at the annual conference of the College of Occupational Therapists (COT) specialist work section, being held in Manchester today, and copies are being sent to all 29,000 members of the British Association of Occupational Therapists. It is intended that an electronic web based version will also be made available for any health professional wanting to improve their ability to provide vocational advice to patients.

Minster Ivan Lewis said:

"The positive links between health, work and well being are now well understood, yet people with a health condition or disability continue to have lower employment outcomes than the rest of the population. This is a particular problem for individuals with mental health problems, especially those with more severe conditions. However, we know that most want to work and enjoy the personal, social and financial benefits having a job brings."

"Unemployment is a major factor causing social exclusion and poor mental health. A key aim of the modernisation of care services for people of working age is to ensure all health professionals recognise the importance of discussing work with patients and are able to help them access the support they need to retain a job or return to work. That is why we are working with key partners to equip staff with the knowledge and skills they need."

"We continue to encourage, and work with, professional bodies to look at the training and other materials available on vocational advice and support. I welcome the publication of *Work Matters*. It is an example of good partnership working, and this innovative piece of work will improve the ability of occupational therapy staff to deliver appropriate vocational advice and signposting to patients."

Work Matters has been jointly developed by the National Social Inclusion Programme and the COT. The booklet draws on latest evidence on how to engage with people about their work capabilities and encouraging them to take appropriate steps for achieving a return to employment.

Notes for Editors:

1. People with mental health problems face social exclusion throughout their life and the Social Exclusion Unit report: *Mental Health and Social Exclusion*, (2004), showed that people with mental health problems had fewer life chances, including earlier mortality, and faced greater hardship and prejudice than other groups.
2. People with mental health problems have the highest unemployment rate of any disabled group, with over one million who want to work currently jobless.
3. The average employment rate for the UK working age population is 74%, which compares to 47% for all people with a disability, 21% of people with long-term mental illness in work and only 12% for people with severe mental health problems (2006 figures).
4. Over 20 government departments and agencies have been working together with the National Social Inclusion Programme (NSIP) to implement the SEU's report's 27 sets of cross-cutting action points. As well as leading on this work NSIP is supporting an integrated approach to mental health social inclusion policy at the national, regional and local levels.
5. The College of Occupational Therapists (COT) is the professional body for occupational therapy staff with 29,000 members. It represents the profession nationally and internationally and contributes widely to policy throughout the UK, setting professional and educational standards and providing leadership and guidance on practice, education, research and lifelong learning.

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