

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

UK MANIFESTO

In the run up to the General Election, the College of Occupational Therapists is calling on all political parties to –

- Address the current shortage of occupational therapists
- Improve conditions for students and their recruitment
- Give occupational therapy rehabilitation professionals proper recognition

Please help us to achieve these goals by raising these issues with your local parliamentary candidates. We hope that you find this document a useful guide for discussions with your future MPs, ensuring they see occupational therapy as an essential service.

THE BENEFITS OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Why is it important?

Occupational therapists work with people to give them greater independence by improving their ability to do the things that are important to them. The College of Occupational Therapists represents some 27,000 people in the UK, all either working in – or studying – occupational therapy. Occupational therapists work in a number of different areas, including:

- NHS and private hospitals
- Charities and voluntary agencies
- Disabled living centres
- Equipment companies
- Government agencies
- Housing departments
- Industrial and commercial organisations
- Local community services, e.g. GP practices
- Social Care Services
- Person's own home
- Private Practice
- Residential and nursing homes
- Schools and colleges
- Wheelchair services
- Universities

One of the Government's intentions, stated in "Choosing Health" (Department of Health, 2004), is to achieve good health for everyone in England. The document noted that a lack of employment and activity contributed to lower health. Occupational therapists perform a vital task in:

- **Getting people back to work**

Occupational therapy helps people to access, remain in, or return to work after illness or impairment. An occupational therapist may suggest ways of adapting an office to accommodate someone after an injury. When people become ill or disabled, they can lose the ability to carry out normal daily activities, which, in turn, may stop them working. An occupational therapist can help these people to regain some or all of their lost skills.

- **Ensuring patients are not readmitted to hospital**

Occupational therapists have a critical role in enabling hospital patients to return home, as they assess what is needed to help them cope. Occupational therapists assess individuals' abilities to carry out the activities that will allow them to continue to live at home as independently as possible, with increased confidence and sense of wellbeing, and a potentially reduced package of care. Community occupational therapists continue to support people in their own homes to prevent them losing their independence. Occupational therapy services in Accident and Emergency, mental health teams, orthopaedic screening services and falls programmes show evidence of improved medical outcomes, fewer admissions, and shorter inpatient stays.

- **Improving people's lives**

Occupational therapists' work ensures people lead more fulfilling and rewarding lives by helping them to do the things that are important to them, and which are essential for wellbeing. The activities that contribute to a person's identity can be used by occupational therapists to restore or maintain balanced life roles. Occupational therapists aim to work collaboratively with individuals to enable them to reach their potential, helping people to fulfil valued roles and responsibilities and participate in their communities and society. Occupational therapists deal with a quarter of all referrals to the local authority social (work) services and in some authorities, as many as 40 per cent.

The College of Occupational Therapists calls on all the political parties to:

- **Address the current shortage of occupational therapists**

There is a chronic shortfall in working occupational therapists. This means that patients who might otherwise be ready to go home remain in hospital while awaiting assessment, their beds unavailable for other patients. Likewise, people remain on state benefit after illness or injury, when occupational therapy could play a key role in helping them return to work. Owing to historical understaffing in some services many people have to wait months for an occupational therapy service. This perpetuates avoidable dependency and social exclusion.

Occupational therapy is one of five Allied Health Professions where the need for greater funding for training has been prioritised by the Government, but workforce planning is woefully poor – the College wants the Government to ensure that Strategic Health Authorities commission the number of occupational therapists that are needed for the population.

- **Improve conditions for students and their recruitment**

In recognition of the vital role that occupational therapists perform, financial strategies are needed to reverse the burden of student debt and attract increased numbers into training.

- **Give occupational therapy rehabilitation professionals proper recognition**

Politicians frequently refer only to “doctors and nurses”, thus devaluing the contribution of other professions. Occupational therapists make the difference between –

- Dependence and independence
- Social participation or social exclusion
- Personal autonomy and wellbeing versus the loss of self esteem

We want all staff to be valued and we want the political parties to recognise that investment in rehabilitation services pays dividends for individuals, their carers and the public purse.