

Become an effective ambassador for the profession

How to influence service users and consumers

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The purpose of being an ambassador for the occupational therapy profession

The College would like to encourage members (both professionals and associates) to become ambassadors for occupational therapy to improve the understanding of occupational therapy and promote its benefits and value.

Why does the profession need ambassadors?

Occupational therapy is little understood by people who have not come into contact with an occupational therapist. However, we know that occupational therapy is a highly effective service and has an enviable track record of enhancing the health and wellbeing of service users.

The ambassador role

As an ambassador, your objective is to raise awareness of occupational therapy. You need to be able to demonstrate to the general public, health and social care professionals, commissioners and the media, the value and positive outcomes occupational therapy provides. An ambassador needs to have a proactive approach and MUST be able to articulate the role and value of occupational therapy in layman's language. Appendix 1 will help you to do this.

An ambassador needs to:

- Be confident in describing and promoting occupational therapy
- Take advantage of every opportunity to promote occupational therapy
- Ensure colleagues and stakeholders understand the OT role (so that OTs are not described within a collective function ie someone from social services)
- Ensure that senior management (including non-OT line managers) understand what makes OT different to other health and social care roles and convey to management the value it provides
- Reinforce that occupational therapy is unique, and its focus and output is of a holistic, personalised assessment of a person's individual occupational needs and aspirations.

Target audience

As an ambassador, you can decide the audience you want to target, for example, promoting occupational therapy to school teachers and students, 6th form, further education and higher education staff and parents; managers of care and residential homes; to GPs and other medical and clinical professionals; commissioners; employers; charity workers; social care professionals; local authorities and national government; the media and the general public. But don't forget your colleagues, your line managers and senior managers who you have day to day contact with, particularly if they are non-OTs, tell them about what you are doing and the positive outcomes you have achieved.

Targeting service users

This guidance gives you information on how to target service users. Service users are your strongest advocates, particularly in these days of social media and instant reviews of services in websites such as Patient Opinions that allow service users to publicise their experiences for free in Trip Advisor style.

Service users also have some influence as they can tell their GPs or other health care professionals what service they want, so they can request to be referred to an OT, but they need to be aware of what OTs do.

Things to do as an ambassador

Inform your manager

Obtain permission from your line manager before taking on the ambassador role, and make sure your line manager knows what you intend to do. Remember, this should not impact on your personal productivity.

Get your facts

- Gather your evidence to show the positive outcomes that occupational therapy has delivered
- Find relevant examples that your service user will understand, don't use mental health examples when talking to someone who has reduced physical abilities
- Be realistic about what occupational therapy can do, don't over promise and heighten the expectations of the service users and their carers

Developing your plan

- Involve your colleagues and your line manager in the planning. It is far easier to work as a team to promote occupational therapy
- Ensure your messages are relevant to the service user's needs
- Set up a system to record the difference you have made to the service user. Get quotes and testimonials that highlight the successful outcomes of your interventions. You can write a case study. Appendix 2 provides useful tips on producing a case study.

Organisation website

- Ensure that occupational therapy services are featured on your employer's' website. Write the copy if necessary. You can cover the different areas of occupational therapy that your service offers. Make sure occupational therapy is not amalgamated with other services.

National awareness weeks and community events

Taking part in national promotional activities is an excellent way to market occupational therapy. Events such as Mental Health Day, Falls Prevention Week and Non Smoking Day are well established publicised events, so make sure occupational therapy is profiled. Equally some employers/organisations participate in community events, so take this opportunity to promote occupational therapy as well as being seen to be an active and positive corporate citizen. Ideas to promote OT services to service users can be found in Appendix 3. The local media may be interested in your activities, so work with your employer's media team to discover the best way to take advantage of media interest. Appendix 4 provides advice on how to work with the media.

Promoting occupational therapy everyday

Being an active ambassador can be woven into your everyday work activities, for example:

Service users' consultation

When you meet a service user and their family/carers, always introduce yourself as an occupational therapist. Explain your role to the service user and how you intend to help him/her, highlighting the unique approach of occupational therapy (without using jargon that your service users may not understand).

Choose and book

Make sure your clinics are listed on the National Choose and Book system; this will make it easier for GPs to find your service when service users ask for occupational therapy input. Visit the following website for more information: www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk

Reports

When you write your reports for the service users use occupational therapy language when describing your intervention such as describing how occupational therapy has encouraged self determination through the use of daily activities/occupations. So you are reinforcing the uniqueness of the profession and showing what a difference occupational therapy can make.

If you are a BAOT member, use the letters MBAOT after your name when you sign reports or any other documents.

Ambassadors should not overstate the benefits of occupational therapy and should be realistic about what occupational therapy can achieve.

Use of social media

Social media is an exciting and responsive media that can be used to communicate on both a professional and personal level. It is however, very important not to muddle these communications. Your personal Facebook pages should remain personal, therefore do not accept service users or their family members as friends on your personal Facebook pages, no matter how friendly or persistent they appear to be.

You can have a professional Facebook account, but be clear on how you want to use it. You can use your professional Facebook account to give advice, provide links to useful resources on other social media sites such as YouTube. Mark your professional Facebook page so that it cannot be confused with your personal Facebook. One way you can do this, if you are a BAOT member is to use the designation letters MBAOT after your name.

Descriptions of some social media networks can be found in Appendix 5.

If you intend to use social media in your ambassador role, be mindful of the hazards, including internet trolls(someone who takes pleasure in posting nasty, negative messages) and hate sites. These can be very destructive and can undermine all your good work as an ambassador.

What ambassadors should not do?

Taking on an ambassador role is not an excuse for falling behind in your occupational therapy job; so please make sure your case load does not suffer when undertaking ambassadorial activities. Remember you can weave the role of being an ambassador into your everyday tasks.

Being an ambassador is not a figurehead role, it is a practical role which requires you to take all opportunities to promote occupational therapy.

Materials to promote occupational therapy

Consumer leaflets

The following consumer leaflets are available from the College. Contact reception@cot.co.uk to order. Alternatively, you can download the PDFs from the College website www.cot.org.uk.

These leaflets can help you to promote your services by distributing the materials at in-house events, community organised activities, and placed within your local health, social and community centres such as GP surgeries, libraries, health centres and Citizen Advice Bureaux. You can also leave this material with your service users when you visit them.

Consumer leaflets are available detailing the benefits of occupational therapists working with the following:

- Children
- Dementia
- Employment
- Equipment
- Healthy ageing
- Pain management
- Stroke recovery
- Work related stress

Guidance

Guidance documents have been produced to help you disseminate and promote the success of occupational therapy interventions. These include:

- Key messages to promote occupational therapy, Appendix 1
- Case study, Appendix 2
- Media relations, Appendix 4

Monitoring progress and evaluation

You need to assess if your activities are improving the understanding about occupational therapy amongst service users, their carers and the general public. Below are some measures you can use to monitor the effectiveness of your activities:

- Improved quality of referrals to your service (particularly if service users can self refer to your services)
- Number of invitations to speak at community events and club meetings such as the WI, mother and toddler groups
- Occupational therapists feeling confident in explaining and promoting occupational therapy to service users and others

Appendix 1

Creating positive messages to promote occupational therapy

This document is a guide only that will help you to create your own messages to promote occupational therapy. Do use case studies from your workplace to demonstrate how occupational therapy can make a difference.

Occupational therapy – helping people to live life their way

What is occupational therapy?

Occupational therapy promotes health, wellbeing and independence through participation in activities or occupation. These are the things that make us who we are and give our life meaning, from daily tasks such as washing and dressing, to working, socialising or taking part in a hobby. Occupational therapy gives people the tools and skills to do the things they need or want to do, removing obstacles to disability, injury, illness or other conditions.

“Occupational therapy enables people to achieve health, wellbeing and life satisfaction through participation in occupation.” (COT Definition 2004)

What makes occupational therapy different from other health and social care professionals?

When people cannot do the activities they need or want to do due to illness, disability or ageing, their health and wellbeing will be affected. Occupational therapists are skilled in activity analysis and help people to overcome barriers in order to enable people to achieve their goals and live life their way.

Who can benefit from occupational therapy?

Everyone: babies, children, adults and older people.

Occupational therapists work in many fields:

- Physical health
- Mental health and learning disabilities
- Vocational rehabilitation (returning to and remaining in work)
- Public health
- Children and young people's services
- Reablement
- Housing

The occupational therapist's role

Occupational therapists work with people to help them achieve goals that are important to them. They take a holistic approach, assessing each individual's needs as a 'whole' including physical, psychological, social, and emotional aspects.

Occupational therapists use a range of tools, techniques and skills. They may:

- Teach new skills for self care, home, work, school or leisure activities
- Develop a rehabilitation programme to help rebuild lost skills and restore lost confidence
- Provide specialist equipment to assist with daily activities
- Advise on home and workplace modifications, such as adaptations for wheelchair access
- Provide assistive technology
- Give support for managing pain
- Provide strength and balance training
- Devise coping strategies for stress, anxiety or depression
- Provide memory triggers and techniques
- Support people with making social connections
- Assist people to return to work

- Organise support and rehabilitation groups for carers and service users.

The benefits of occupational therapy

Occupational therapy improves the lives of people of all ages by helping them to take part in the occupations or activities of daily living. An occupational therapist can help someone to manage activities safely and independently; achieve personal goals; understand their illness or condition; maintain their dignity; improve their self confidence and self-esteem; restore enjoyment and participation in favourite pastimes or hobbies.

Occupational therapy can prevent:

Accidents and injury

Ill health

Dependency on hospital services

Risk of developing major illnesses such as coronary heart disease and diabetes

Premature admission to residential or nursing care

Social isolation

Loss of employment

Occupational therapy promotes:

Independent living

Longevity

Effective management of long term conditions

Social inclusion

Participation in activities

Access to work (returning or remaining) and education

Health and wellbeing

Occupational therapy is unique

1. Occupational therapy is the only profession that improves health and wellbeing by enabling people to undertake daily activities or occupations that they need or want to do.
2. Occupational therapy is person centred, helping people to do the things that are important to them. An occupational therapist will work alongside an individual to understand their needs and help them reach their chosen goals.
3. When people cannot do the activities they need or want to do due to illness, disability or ageing, their health and wellbeing will be affected. Occupational therapists are skilled in activity analysis and help people to overcome barriers in order to enable people to achieve their goals and live life their way.

Occupational therapy is essential

1. Occupational therapy is founded on the knowledge that occupation – what we do every day – is essential to human existence. Occupational therapy helps people to do the activities they value and enjoy. These are the things that make us who we are; give us purpose and a sense of identity. This is essential to us as human beings and essential to health and wellbeing.
2. Whether adjusting to an injury, illness, long term condition, or simply growing older, occupational therapy is a lifeline. It gives people the support they need to overcome barriers they may face, and relearn skills for getting the most from life, helping them to achieve more than they thought possible. Without occupational therapy intervention, people who are unable to do those activities can continue to face complications from mental health difficulties, poor mobility, social isolation, inability to work, all of which can be avoided.

Occupational therapy can transform lives

1. Occupational therapy reduces dependency on hospital services, residential or nursing care, enabling people to live independently in their own home for longer. This is even more important as people live longer and health needs become more complex. Occupational therapy makes a substantial and positive contribution to the health and wellbeing of the UK population, delivering care cost effectively. By providing health and positive health benefits for low cost, occupational therapy is saving the government and the taxpayer significant amounts of money.
2. Occupational therapy is the key to preventative and integrated health and social care. It takes a long term approach to care, helping people to improve, regain, or maintain health and wellbeing for as long as possible, and continuing to provide support as their health and social care needs change over time.

Occupational therapists are unique and highly skilled practitioners and essential members of the health and social care workforce

1. Occupational therapists are highly skilled practitioners with specific skills in problem solving, activity analysis, environment adaptations (work and home) and rehabilitation.
2. Occupational therapists have a unique understanding of the affects of ageing, long term conditions, accident or illness and its impact on occupational ability.
3. Occupational therapists are experts in person-centred practice. They take the time to listen and understand each person's needs and aspirations. By taking a person centred approach, service users can achieve and maintain their goals in the most effective way.
4. Occupational therapists cross the boundaries between healthcare, social care and community care. They have a wide breadth of knowledge, enabling occupational therapists to respond to complex and wide ranging issues, and signposting service users to support available in other sectors.
5. Occupational therapists work in partnership with a range of professionals, such as doctors, physiotherapists, social workers, equipment suppliers, and architects, as well as families, carers and employers.
6. Occupational therapists practise in a diverse range of settings, including hospitals, health centres, schools, residential and nursing care, children's centres, prisons, workplaces, voluntary organisations and independent practice.

Appendix 2

Case studies: an ambassador tool for targeting service users and consumers

A case study is a useful tool that will help you to describe how occupational therapy has been applied. Case studies outline the situation, what was done to improve the situation and the benefit/outcome/s. Case studies should emphasise your practical approach and include the evidence demonstrating the value of occupational therapy.

You can use case studies to explain to service users new to occupational therapy how you are going to work with them. Case studies are also very useful for press stories and website features that profiles your services. .

How to write a case study

The service user's needs

Describe your service user and the challenges and barriers they faced. Give your readers enough insight about your service user so the reader can empathise with their situation. For example:

The service user is a middle aged woman who has had a stroke. She works with animals and is keen to return to work. The stroke has left her with reduced mobility on her left side and she fears going out as she has lost her confidence to meet people.

In this example, we know how the service user has been affected by her health, her aspirations and her fears.

Your role

Explain the occupational therapy intervention. Use the occupational therapy philosophy to underpin the explanation of your intervention.

There are three points to make:

- Occupational therapy acknowledges the link between what people can and can't do and how this impacts on their health and wellbeing. Demonstrate how you ascertained the service user's goals.
- Outline how you used activity analysis (as OTs are experts in this technique) to meet your service user's needs and the positive outcomes achieved.
- Occupational therapy is a highly effective service ie you were able to help the service user to return to meaningful daily activity such as employment, school or homecare therefore reducing their need for additional benefits or dedicated care.

Benefits and results

The benefits section needs to be punchy, so try not to exceed 50 words. Include how the service user feels after occupational therapy intervention. Where possible, use a quote or testimonial from the service user. You may want to help your service user with their quote as that way you can make sure the right message is conveyed. For example, "I don't think I could have gone back to work after my stroke, if it hadn't been for the support I received from [insert name], my occupational therapist. She has arranged for new equipment that will help me to safely handle the animals and she has given me the confidence to overcome my fear of travelling on public transport."

Appendix 3

Ideas for activities to promote OT to service users and consumers

Display board

Set up a display board at your workplace or in a local community centre

Suggestions for your display board

- Pictures of occupational therapy in action
- Photos of the occupational therapy team and their names
- Brief case studies of how occupational therapy has helped your clients (ensure you have permission of the service user)
- List the different fields of occupational therapy
- Information about accessing OT services

Running a stall

Run a stall outside a supermarket or in a shopping precinct giving away leaflets, pens and consumer literature. Identify local community events taking place throughout the year and see how you and your team can be involved.

Activities for a stall at a community event

- Ask visitors what they know about occupational therapy
- Guess the gadget competition. Display interesting items such as adapted cutlery, jar openers, hand rails and ask people what they think they are
- Hand out leaflets and other give aways such as pens and balloons

Volunteer to be a guest speaker

Speak to a meeting of your local WI or WRVS, or arrange a coffee morning and invite club members to attend. You can also contact community breakfast clubs and parent and toddler groups - they often welcome guest speakers to their meetings. Take the opportunity to show the films that promote occupational therapy.

Presentation subjects

If you are invited to talk to a community group, here are some presentation subjects depending on your audience:

Equipment in your home

- How equipment can help you
- Types of equipment available
- How can you access equipment
- What OTs can do to help?

Working is good for you

- The benefits of work
- How OTs can help with helping people to remain or return to work
- Type of OT support that is available and how to get OT support?

Developmental milestones for children

- What can you do to help your child meet the development milestone?
- What other support is available?
- How occupational therapy can help?

Helping an older relative

- What type of help would an older relative need?
- How can you access this help?

- How occupational therapy can help

Appendix 4

Media relations

Getting stories in the media is an excellent way of attracting the attention of service users, however, most organisations have a dedicated professional communication team and if you do want to place stories of your successes in the media, you need to brief them.

However, before contacting your communications department make sure you inform your manager and get permission to contact your communications team. They will have many demands on their time, so make sure that you supply information that the communications team can work with. There are a few useful things that you need to consider:

Provide information that is newsworthy ie new or original information, timely, and relevant.

Providing a client with a stairlift is not a news story, in fact if you want to report this, it may backfire, as people will be asking why is this news?! Providing the 1,000th stairlift this year is better, and then you can use this as a hook to explain how occupational therapists can help arrange home adaptations and provide equipment that enables service users to remain independent and safe in their own home. Remember to highlight the human interest side of the story, what the installation of the stairlift means for the service user, so for example, being able to go upstairs to have a bath, rather than having to wash themselves in the kitchen sink etc.

You can also make a story more compelling for your communications department by:

- Linking to a national and/or international initiative
- Using new statistics or reports on your service
- Showing how your service is responding to a current trend/government priority
- Involving a VIP, a politician, local celebrity or known individual

You also need to provide your communication team with service users' details so that the communication team can obtain their permission to profile them.

You need to be clear about what message you want to be conveyed. It's best to have up to three messages, no more, as this can be confusing. Don't forget to back up these messages with examples and statistics.

Remember you are targeting the general public, so think about:

- Who are you trying to inform, educate or influence?
- What information/messages do you want to convey?
- What is the human interest element to your story?

Make sure you are available for interviews provided you have approval to be your employer's media spokesperson and can respond to journalist's requests for interviews/additional information.

Journalists have very tight deadlines; they may only have until the end of the day to produce their articles, so you need to make sure you are available and prepared to speak to them. Think about the five Ws, Who, What, Where, When and hoW of your story, this will help you make sure you have the relevant information in an easy to access and flexible format.

Lastly, make sure you are able to define and focus on the OT input. Don't let your message be diluted by other health professional activities.

Things not to do when dealing with the media

- Don't talk about sensitive/negative areas. Focus on the positive, such as service users' benefits and repeat positive information that you want to convey
- Don't make political statements
- Only provide information on areas you know, don't get drawn into expressing a personal opinion (no matter how flattering it is to be asked) - you are speaking on behalf of your organisation and not yourself
- Keep to your key messages; don't stray onto other subject matters (politicians are a good example of doing this)

Appendix 5

Types of social media

Facebook

Facebook is the biggest social networking website. You can share information with friends and invite discussions and tell your networks about occupational therapy.

Twitter

[Twitter](#) is a service that lets users share short messages (maximum of 140 characters) or “tweets”, online. These messages can be viewed by anyone visiting that user’s Twitter profile. You’ll find allied health and social care groups, local government members and policy makers, charities and other individuals and organisations communicating via Twitter. It’s a good medium for signposting alerts, conveying “hot of the press” information to direct traffic to your website for more detailed information.

LinkedIn

[LinkedIn](#) enables users to create professional profiles, network with other professionals, and join online groups relating specifically to professional issues. It is a useful way of expanding your professional network.

NB: When using social media please be aware of issues of confidentiality when referring to successes and professional highlights.

Also remember you are accountable for what you say on social media, there have been a number of instances when professional conduct has been questioned when a health professional used social media and this has led to fitness for practice hearings conducted by HCPC.