

Become an effective ambassador for the profession

How to influence commissioners via decision makers

Content

- The purpose of ambassadors for the occupational therapy profession
- The ambassador role
- Target audience
- Targeting commissioners
- Things to do as an ambassador
- Promoting success
- Promoting occupational therapy within the workplace
- Materials to promote occupational therapy
- Monitoring progress
- Evaluation

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 OT. However, we know that occupational therapy is a highly effective service and has an enviable track record of introducing innovative and value for money approaches that enhances 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, etc, 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 commissioners

This guidance gives you information on how to target commissioners and outlines what evidence is available.

Commissioners are a key target audience who need to understand the role and the value for money that occupational therapy services can deliver. Commissioners are responsible for allocating budgets to meet health and social care needs in their local area. They are interested in positive outcomes and evidence that occupational therapy services deliver quality and effective services, whilst maximising commissioners' limited financial budgets.

Targeting commissioners is complex and there are challenges and issues in communicating directly with them. Some organisations have clearly defined rules and processes for contacting commissioners, so make sure you do not breach these rules and keep your line manager informed of your planned activities.

You can, nevertheless, create a “buzz” about OT within your organisation, to engage your colleagues, senior management and decision makers, so they understand and are able to convey the value for money and positive outcomes that occupational therapy delivers to commissioners. They are the people who will decide whether it is an OT (or others) who can deliver the service outcomes required by the commissioners.

Delivering a quality service is important. You must also make sure your colleagues, managers and directors know of your successes, so use every communication channel available to you, think about how you can use your in-house magazines, intranet, notice boards etc.

Things to do as an ambassador

Inform your manager

Do 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, as your line manager also needs to be able to understand and be accountable for your work time.

Get your facts

- Gather your evidence to show the positive outcomes you have delivered and use organisation/sectors' acknowledged outcomes measures.
- Find relevant case studies and establish the financial savings achieved and quantify your successes. For example, the amount of money you have saved; the number of service users helped; the reduction in bed nights providing significant savings for commissioners' budgets. Appendix 2 will help you to write case studies.
- Demonstrate how occupational therapy meets your organisation's priorities, use examples from your case load such as the number of service users who have been able to return to work following your intervention.
- Know your commissioners' targets and agendas, so you can tailor your evidence to resonate with their targets.

Developing your plan

- Involve your colleagues and your line managers in the planning. It is far easier to work as a team to promote occupational therapy
- Ensure your messages are relevant and consistent with your organisation's priorities
- Set up a system that enables you to evaluate and measure the successful outcomes of your interventions. Make sure these outcomes are related to your organisation's priorities. For example, if the priority is to help people with long term conditions to return to work then provide the evidence showing that OT has achieved this.

Staff newsletters and intranets

- Profile your department and OT services in every communication channel within your organisation including the intranet and newsletters. Provide regular success stories to the editor, and use case studies. Task staff to write about events/success stories as they happen. Provide cost saving examples and quotes from your service users. Use appendix 2 and 3 to help write stories for in-house and external media.

Organisation website

- Ensure that occupational therapy services are featured on your 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. Some of the following materials can be posted on your organisation's website:

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 take part in community events, so take this opportunity to promote occupational therapy as well as being seen to be an active and positive corporate citizen.

Proactive promotion

"Try before you buy". This may be appropriate for you if you work in independent practice or if your service is actively promoting itself to commissioners. You can offer your services on a day trial to a GP commissioner or service commissioner so they can experience the benefits of occupational therapy in their practice/area.

Promoting occupational therapy within the workplace

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

Reports

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

Make sure you provide feedback to all your health professional colleagues who have referred patients/service users to your service. Your professional colleagues will hear from their patients/service users but take the opportunity to explain other ways occupational therapy can support your colleagues' own service/practice and it is the only way to have these records added to your patients/service users' files.

Show how occupational performance has been improved and/or how personal occupational goals have been fulfilled; include comparison costs and the savings achieved. You can provide examples, such as how you put in place strategies that enabled a service user to manage their fatigue as a result of a long term condition, to cope with their everyday activities without the need for additional care in the home.

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

Choose and book

Make sure your clinics are listed on the National Choose and Book system; this will make it easier for GPs and other health professionals to refer to your services. Visit the following website for more information: <http://www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/>

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).

Case conferences

When you take part in a case conference, introduce yourself as an occupational therapist. Do not assume that everyone at the meeting will know your role. In follow up meetings, reinforce the difference your intervention has made and also talk about cost savings and value for money, if appropriate. Ensure your reports use OT professional language, and if necessary explain what you mean, don't use medical language, because you think that everyone understands this.

What ambassadors do 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.

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

Materials to promote occupational therapy

Evidence fact sheets

These fact sheets demonstrate, in part, the cost effectiveness of occupational therapy and contain some evidence on its value. Use these to form part of your presentations and include in correspondence with senior management. They cover the following topics:

- Accident and emergency
- Autism
- Definition of occupational therapy, its value and belief
- Dementia and their carers
- Maximising the potential of disabled children through occupational therapy
- Long term conditions
- Mental health problems
- People with learning disabilities
- Preventing and reducing admissions through A&E departments
- Prevention of falls
- Promotion of general health and wellbeing in the elderly
- Social care
- Stroke recovery

Service commissioners' films

These films explain how occupational therapy benefits service users and can save money for commissioners. You can download the following films from the College's website

(www.cot.org.uk):

- Children
- Long term conditions
- Older people
- People with poor mental health
- General featuring the four topics above

In addition, evidence and further information is posted alongside these films on the College website.

There is also a leaflet targeting commissioners of stroke services showing the benefits and value for money of OT intervention.

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, health centres and Citizen Advice Bureaux.

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

- | | |
|--------------|-----------------------|
| • Children | • Healthy ageing |
| • Dementia | • Pain management |
| • Employment | • Stroke recovery |
| • Equipment | • 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 3
- Using social media, appendix 4

Monitoring progress

Record your positive outcomes and feedback, particularly tangible evidence, (further information can be found in the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct*) for example:

- The number of service users who have remained at home rather than being admitted into a care home
- The number of children with disabilities who are able to attend mainstream schools as a result of occupational therapy intervention rather than special schools
- The number of service users that have successfully returned to work as a result of occupational therapy intervention, rather than drawing incapacity benefit

*College of Occupational Therapists, Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, COT (2010) London

Evaluation

All occupational therapy interventions need to be evaluated. Where possible try and use standardised outcomes to measure your success, such as the QIPP, NHS Outcomes. Below are some measures you can use to monitor the effectiveness of your activities:

- Increased awareness and value of occupational therapy services among your senior staff and management, leading to more support for your services
- A number of case studies on occupational therapy successes publicised by your organisation
- Increase in the number of relevant referrals to occupational therapy services
- Occupational therapists feeling confident in explaining and promoting occupational therapy to colleagues, service users and others
- The ultimate success will be the inclusion of the value for money that occupational therapy services provide, conveyed to commissioners via your board/senior management.

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 the value for money of your occupational therapy services.

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 commissioners

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.

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 lacks the 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 only tangible benefits (how you saved costs) and soft benefits (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."

Media relations

Getting stories in the media is an excellent way of attracting the attention of commissioners, 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 talk about the other clients who have benefited from the installation of a stairlift in their home.

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 and quote 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.

Think about your target audience

- Who are you trying to inform, educate or influence?
- Are you targeting the general public or someone outside the health sector?
- 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 such as cuts. 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 4

Using social media

Social media is one way that you can create a buzz about occupational therapy. It is quick and simple to use, and it can be a very effective way to promote your successes. As an active user of social media you may develop professional links that can benefit your role as an ambassador. Below are a few social network channels you can use:

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.