Briefing for members and staff of the Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) co-ordinating service and site visits by key stakeholders

Purpose

Site and service visits are a crucial part of spreading the word of the work and value of occupational therapists in the health and social system. They give a greater sense of perspective to key decision makers and influencers, and give them anecdotal examples on which they can base their public pronouncements.

Professions vie for their attention; this is an opportunity to show them occupational therapists are the critical link in the chain, and deserve more public exposure and attention in decision making processes.

Preparation

RCOT will ensure the visitor receives a short briefing, much like this one. This will include:

- All relevant logistical information
- Some key messages
- Name and mobile phone number for the identified key contact on site
- Contact details for identified RCOT staff

Key messages

It is crucial that anybody speaking to the visitor at any length knows what the key messages for the profession are, and is familiar with the Improving Lives, Saving Money campaign. Time is precious with such a visitor, and each interaction is an opportunity to repeat the key messages on the value of occupational therapy.

Repetition will not bore them – it will demonstrate that everybody is well briefed and understands the public policy implications of what they do. RCOT will ensure you receive several copies of the most relevant report ahead of the visit – please read this and share a copy with the visitor at the end.

The RCOT campaign *Occupational Therapy: Improving Lives Saving Money* is making the case through a series of reports for occupational therapists in key pressure points in NHS and care services.

The reports are:

- Reducing the pressure on hospitals: the value of occupational therapy (November 2016), and follow up leaflet (January 2018)
- Living not existing, putting prevention at the heart of care for older people (July 2017)
- Fire and Rescue Services: the value of working in partnership with occupational therapists (November 2017)
- Prisons: the value of occupational therapy (March 2018)
- Getting my life back: Occupational therapy: promoting mental health and wellbeing (May 2018)
Top lines:

- Occupational therapy should be used to enhance the prevention agenda which will help to put health and care services onto a more sustainable footing, improving lives and saving money.
- The occupational therapy workforce is high-skilled and person-centred, and should be deployed more widely in leadership roles and at every level of the health and social care system.

To this end the overarching key messages from the reports are:

- Deploying more occupational therapists to work in primary care to use our skills to intervene early.
- Occupational therapists are a limited resource. We can be more effective in addressing the needs of the local population by training and supervising others to be competent to deliver on aspects of traditional practice – minor adaptations, practising skills in activities of daily living.
- Occupational therapists can act as catalysts for addressing needs beyond traditional health and social care, such as social isolation, employment and education, by leading on developing wider partnership working and sitting in mainstream services such as schools, occupational health and frontline services.

Who should be involved?

- Depending on the role of the visitor, it may be appropriate to involve the chief executive of the trust – their office will be able to advise on this.
- Your organisation’s communications team must be aware of the visit and be involved in the organisation.
- It is advisable to involve the head of therapies/occupational therapy, or the occupational therapy lead (if this is not you!).
- A person with lived experience who can talk about their experience of using the service.

What should be included?

Visiting a service can give a stakeholder so much information about the profession in a short space of time. Aim to:

- Demonstrate how your service is making peoples’ lives better – talking to a person with lived experience is great for this.
- Match the RCOT key messages with what your service does when speaking to the stakeholder.
- Demonstrate the profession through opportunities to observe an aspect of practice or giving a practical demonstration.
- Your organisation may have something specific to include in the visit that they wish to highlight.
- Consider identifying a member of staff to write up the visit for OTNews – this could be a member of the team or the communications team.

How can the stakeholder support the profession?

Make sure you thank the visitor and make it clear the whole profession values their interest, and suggest that they help us promote and achieve some of the recommendations of the ILSM reports.
Key things they can do to support the campaign:

- Share the report with colleagues and wider stakeholders.
- Promote the role of occupational therapists in supporting the NHS and social care to meet increasing demands on services.
- Support the promotion of occupational therapy in wider areas, for example: supporting children in mainstream education or people to remain in work.

Social media

- We encourage you to promote the visit on social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook. Tweets and posts with photographs included do far better than posts only containing text, so always use images where possible.
- On Twitter, please include the hashtag #ValueofOT and tag the College’s username, @RCOT.

Follow-up

- It is very important that a representative of the service follows up with a thank you letter, encouraging the visitor to continue their engagement with RCOT. The College can also follow up with soft copies of the report and suggestions for further action.
- If the visitor would like to achieve media coverage regarding the report, please share any photos with them and with the College, which can help to distribute these with the media.

Do's and don'ts

Do
- Involve the communications team
- Welcome the visitor at the entrance
- Get an emergency mobile phone number for them in case of any problems on the day

Don't
- Go off track on the messages
- Post photos online without the visitor’s permission

For any further information please contact clare.leggett@rcot.co.uk