



Occupational Therapy in Primary Care

This Evidence Spotlight provides some key reading, selected from the evidence base, about occupational therapy in primary care. It is intended to provide an introduction to the topic. Each paper is listed under a broad subject heading, alongside related CPD activities applicable to the four pillars of the RCOT Career Development Framework: Professional Practice; Facilitation of Learning; Leadership; and Evidence, Research and Development (RCOT 2021).

Introduction and Overview

Primary care is often the first point of contact with health and care services for people experiencing physical or mental health problems. It encompasses a range of community-based services, offered by professionals including general practitioners (GPs), pharmacists, dentists and opticians. Throughout the UK, the involvement of allied health professionals, including occupational therapists, in primary care services is growing (Northern Ireland. Department of Health 2016, Scotland. Scottish Government ca. 2020, Wales. Welsh Government 2020, NHS England ca. 2021).

Occupational therapists already work in a number of areas within primary care, predominantly within GP services. They are able to offer early intervention focused on prevention, self-management and proactive care (Bevan Commission 2021). Key areas include working with people with long-term conditions or mental health needs and those experiencing fatigue, frailty or risk of falls, and supporting people to manage/return to work (NHS Wales Primary Care One n.d., NHS England 2021).

The involvement of occupational therapists in primary care has the potential to improve the wellbeing and occupational engagement of individuals, facilitate participation in their communities and improve the efficiency of services. Investigating '*What are the benefits or impact of occupational therapy in primary care settings?*' has been identified as a priority for research by the Royal College of Occupational Therapists and James Lind Alliance Priority Setting Partnership, which brought together people with lived experience, occupational therapists and people working in the health and care sector to identify the Top 10 research priorities for occupational therapy in the UK (Royal College of Occupational Therapists 2021).

This Evidence Spotlight includes a broad but not exhaustive range of research papers to provide a starting point for critically considering the evidence base, with accompanying CPD activities.

References:

Bevan Commission (2021) *Evaluating the value and impact of occupational therapy in primary care*. Swansea: Bevan Commission. Available at: <https://www.bevancommission.org/post/evaluating-the-value-and-impact-of-occupational-therapy-in-primary-care>

NHS England [ca. 2021] *AHPs in primary care networks*. Redditch: NHS England. Available at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/ahp/ahps-in-primary-care-networks/>

NHS England (2021) *Example job descriptions for allied health professionals*. Redditch: NHS England. Available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/example-job-descriptions-for-allied-health-professionals/>

NHS Wales Primary Care One [n.d.] *Primary care roles in Wales: Occupational therapists*. Cardiff: Primary Care Division, Public Health Wales. Available at: <https://primarycareone.nhs.wales/careers/primary-care-roles-in-wales/occupational-therapists/>

Northern Ireland. Department of Health (2016) *Health and wellbeing 2026: Delivering together*. Belfast: Department of Health, Available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/health-and-wellbeing-2026-delivering-together.pdf>

Royal College of Occupational Therapists (2021) *Top 10 priorities for occupational therapy research in the UK*. London: Royal College of Occupational Therapists. Available at: <https://www.rcot.co.uk/top-10>

Scotland. Scottish Government [ca. 2020] *Primary care services*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/policies/primary-care-services/>

Wales. Welsh Government (2020) *Allied health professions framework for Wales: Looking forward together*. Cardiff: Welsh Government. Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-02/allied-health-professions-framwework-for-wales.pdf>

All websites accessed on: 18.10.21.

Selected Evidence

Development of a Community of Practice

Marcolino et al (2021) undertook a participatory action research project that mapped the trajectory of a community of practice (CoP) which involved seven primary health care occupational therapists and a researcher team in Brazil. The CoP involved three phases, where the group: identified dilemmas and difficulties; investigated their practices; and innovated solutions by developing tools to support clinical reasoning and increase visibility of the scope of occupational therapy practice.

Reference:

Marcolino TQ, Kinsella EA, Araujo A da S., Fantinatti EN, Takayama GM, Vieira NMU ... Ferigato SH (2021) A community of practice of primary health care occupational therapists: Advancing practice-based knowledge. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 68(1), 3–11.

Use of the COPM in primary care

Donnelly et al (2017) utilised a sequential mixed-methods design to examine use of the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM) in primary care. The COPM was administered, over 10 months, to people aged 23-91 accessing occupational therapy at interprofessional primary care clinics in Ontario, Canada. Focus groups were conducted with occupational therapists. Findings included that whilst the COPM was valued as a tool to guide initial assessments and provided an occupation-focused lens, gaining opportunities for re-administration was a challenge.

Reference:

Donnelly C, O'Neill C, Bauer M, Letts L (2017) Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM) in primary care: A profile of practice. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 71(6), 1–8.

Lifestyle Redesign® occupational therapy in diabetes management.

Pyatak et al (2019), in a pilot study (that formed part of a wider one-year pilot study involving a randomised controlled trial), report on the integration of a Lifestyle Redesign® occupational therapy (LR-OT) diabetes management programme within an interdisciplinary team at a primary care clinic, as well as preliminary clinical outcomes. The programme was delivered at a clinic serving an ethnically diverse, urban low-income population in Los Angeles County. Factors that challenged or enabled implementation were identified. Clinical outcomes included indications of beneficial changes in diabetes self-care and health status.

Reference:

Pyatak E, King M, Vigen CLP, Salazar E, Diaz J, Schepens Niemiec SL ... Shukla J (2019) Addressing diabetes in primary care: Hybrid effectiveness-implementation study of Lifestyle Redesign® occupational therapy. *American journal of Occupational Therapy*, 73(5), 1–12.

Career Development Framework Pillars

Suggested CPD activities

Facilitation of Learning

Carry out further reading around communities of practice.

Consider how you could develop a CoP to support learning and development in primary care, including formulating innovative solutions to address challenges.

Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) hint: Consider health inequalities in your local area and how a CoP could be used to improve health outcomes.

Evidence, Research and Development

Professional Practice

Consider the strengths and limitations of outcome measure(s) that you currently or could use in primary care, and whether use of them could help improve health outcomes for people accessing services. An outcome measures checklist is available at: <https://www.rcslt.org/outcome-measures-checklist>

JEDI hint: Reflect on whether the outcome measure is culturally sensitive and will enable meaningful engagement.

Leadership

Consider the strengths and limitations of the study and how these may have influenced the findings.

Consider how the challenges and enablers identified in the study might influence how you would lead the design and delivery of new occupational therapy primary care services in the UK.

JEDI hint: Explore how primary care diabetes services can be designed to be culturally sensitive and to reach populations at higher risk of diabetes or health inequalities (for example, people from ethnic groups with higher prevalence of diabetes, people experiencing homelessness).

Acceptability of a primary care stress management and wellbeing programme

Connolly et al (2019), in a mixed methods pilot study conducted in Dublin and involving individuals with self-reported experiences of stress, explored the acceptability of a six-week primary care stress management and wellbeing programme (RENEW). Outcome measures were administered at three time points and qualitative data were collected through a focus group and semi-structured interviews. Findings included that there were improvements in terms of self-reported stress, anxiety and occupational performance and satisfaction.

Reference:

Connolly D, Anderson M, Colgan M, Montgomery J, Clarke J, Kinsella M (2019) The impact of a primary care stress management and wellbeing programme (RENEW) on occupational participation: A pilot study. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 82(2), 112–121.

Primary health care encounters for adults with autism spectrum disorder

Stein Duker et al (2019) conducted an exploratory study (that was part of a larger mixed-methods study) to identify barriers to, and strategies to improve, provision of primary care for adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Participants were recruited via sites in the Southern California and Philadelphia areas, and social media. Data were gathered through surveys completed by adults with ASD, caregivers and primary care providers. Barriers reported by adults with ASD and caregivers included communication challenges and sensory discomfort. Strategies to improve provision included strategic scheduling, minimising wait times and adjusting the lighting.

Reference:

Stein Duker LI, Kim HKS, Pomponio A, Mosqueda L, Pfeiffer B (2019) Examining primary care health encounters for adults with autism spectrum disorder. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 73(5), 1–11.

Feasibility of occupational therapy-led vocational clinics

Drummond et al (2020) conducted a mixed methods study involving two primary care centres, Solent GP surgeries and South Pembrokeshire GP Cluster, to test the feasibility of delivering occupational therapy-led vocational clinics (OTVoc) to provide return to work advice and support for people with musculoskeletal conditions and mental health problems. Data were collected from: anonymised service level data, baseline and follow-up assessments involving people who accessed OTVoc clinics, and interviews with stakeholders (including GPs, employers and occupational therapists). Findings included that sickness absence rates dropped and there was a reduction in use of GP fit notes.

Reference:

Drummond A, Coole C, Nouri F, Ablewhite J, Smyth G (2020) Using occupational therapists in vocational clinics in primary care: A feasibility study. *BMC Family Practice* 21: 268. Available at: <https://bmcfampract.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12875-020-01340-5>

Leadership

Professional Practice

Outline the factors you would need to consider in setting up a stress management programme, including risk assessment and channels for onward referral.

JEDI hint: Explore how perceptions and experiences of stress may differ (for example due to cultural factors) and consider how you can offer services that meet diverse needs.

Leadership

Professional Practice

Reflect on the findings of the study and strategies you could employ to improve the experiences of people with ASD in accessing services.

Carry out further reading on autism.

JEDI hint: Explore literature on autism and intersectionality.

Professional Practice

Consider the strengths and limitations of GP fit notes and Allied Health Professions Health and Work Reports (AHP H&WRs).

JEDI hint: Consider how occupational therapists could work with professional networks, advocacy organisations and communities, to improve policies and practices around inclusive employment and reducing stigma.

Evidence, Research and Development

Considering the findings of this study, how would you design an RCT to examine the clinical and cost-effectiveness of occupational therapy vocational clinics

JEDI hint: How would you integrate patient and public involvement, and address health inequalities within the design?

Access to journal articles

RCOT members can access the full text of these articles via the e-journals collection or, in the case of open access articles, via the link/DOI provided in the reference.

Access the RCOT e-journals collection at: <https://www.rcot.co.uk/practice-resources/library-resources/journals-and-e-journals>

The journals and e-journals webpage provides links to the *American Journal of Occupational Therapy* (AJOT), *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal* (AOTJ), *British Journal of Occupational Therapy* (BJOT) and *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy* (CJOT).

A wide range of other journals are available via the 'Browse all international ejournals' link.

Career Development Framework

The Career Development Framework: Guiding Principles for Occupational Therapy, 2nd edition (RCOT 2021) is an over-arching set of guiding principles for occupational therapy and offers a structured process to guide careers, learning and development within our profession. It contains four interacting Pillars of Practice (each with nine Career Levels):

- Professional Practice
- Facilitation of Learning
- Leadership
- Evidence, Research and Development

Access the framework at: <https://www.rcot.co.uk/cpd-rcot>

Further reading

Members can access a wide range of literature through the RCOT Library e-books and e-journals collections, as well as via the CINAHL and Medline databases.

The RCOT Library has produced a series of information skills guides to help members get the most of the resources available. They cover a range of subjects, from accessing the e-journal and e-books collections, through to searching databases and carrying out literature searches.

Access the guides at: <https://www.rcot.co.uk/practice-resources/library-resources/information-skills>

The library catalogue is available at: <https://www.rcot.co.uk/practice-resources/library-resources/search-library-catalogue>

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