Royal College of Occupational Therapists

Leading neighbourhood health across systems in Portsmouth

Bringing services together around communities

In Portsmouth, occupational therapists are leading a city-wide provider partnership that brings together primary care, community and mental health services, local government and voluntary sector organisations to improve health and wellbeing through a neighbourhood health approach.

The partnership focuses on prevention, early intervention and the wider factors that influence health, including housing, employment, education and social connection. Occupational therapy brings a focus on participation and everyday life, helping services work together around the needs of local communities.

Turning neighbourhood health into action

The partnership has developed a range of initiatives that help people access support earlier and stay connected to their communities.

Examples include:

- Supporting people in mental health inpatient services to engage in physical activity and maintain these activities after discharge.
- Introducing health kiosks in GP practices to improve access to preventative health checks and support self-management.
- Employing Recovery Community Connectors to help people leaving drug and alcohol services reconnect with community activities and support networks.

The partnership has also been selected as part of the national implementation programme for neighbourhood health, focusing on coordinated support for people with cardiovascular disease, frailty and those who frequently use health services.

Developing community wellbeing hubs

An important part of the programme is the development of community wellbeing hubs.

Following work to map community assets across the city, the partnership identified gaps in access to support, particularly in areas of deprivation. Community help desks and wellbeing hubs are now being developed with voluntary sector partners to provide people with a simple route to advice and support relating to health, wellbeing, housing and other everyday challenges.

The aim is to help people get the support they need before problems worsen and to make better use of the strengths and resources already present in local communities.

Developing the future workforce

The partnership is also working with local universities to create learning opportunities within neighbourhood settings. Students from occupational therapy, other allied health professions, medicine and law are gaining experience working alongside communities. This supports people to access a broader range of advice and services while helping future professionals understand social factors that influence health and wellbeing.

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Alongside this, training is being developed for people working in community settings, with a focus on asset-based working, healthy conversation and providing accessible information.

What can occupational therapists learn from this approach?

Portsmouth demonstrates how occupational therapists can lead neighbourhood health by bringing organisations together around a shared goal of helping people live well in their communities.

By focusing on participation, prevention and the wider determinants of health, occupational therapists can play a key role in reducing inequalities, strengthening communities and supporting people to do the things that matter most to them.

> **'Neighbourhood health is about reconnecting with our core strengths, understanding people in the context of their lives, focusing on what matters to them, and working holistically. By being visible and embedded in communities, occupational therapists can have a much greater impact on reducing inequalities and supporting people to live well.'**

Rebecca Burgos, AHP Divisional Lead for Portsmouth and South East Hampshire, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, and Programme Director, Portsmouth Provider Partnership.