

Occupational therapists in primary care



Outline

Introduction to occupational therapy in primary care

What do occupational therapists do in primary care and what's their impact?

What are the views of GPs and patients?

What are their experiences and what support do they need?

What other resources are there?

Introduction

There are about 8000 GP surgeries in the UK and only 300 occupational therapists working in them. We estimate we need at least another 2000 occupational therapists to get national coverage.

We want to expand the number of occupational therapists in GP surgeries so everyone can benefit from early intervention to stay active and independent, at home, at work and everywhere else.

Our recent [research project](#) has shown that occupational therapists bring benefits to patient populations, support primary care teams to manage demand and meet local need, as well as reducing the ongoing demands on secondary care and other sectors.

What do occupational therapists do in primary care?

- Occupational therapists carry out physical and psychosocial assessments that consider health and home management, education, work, leisure, and social participation.
- They formulate plans for therapy including differential diagnosis of conditions impacting on health, functional ability, and activity levels.
- They proactively work in partnership with patients to find solutions that improve health and activity levels.
- Occupational therapy interventions are practical, realistic and goal orientated. They adapt activities to help patients stay active in their everyday lives.

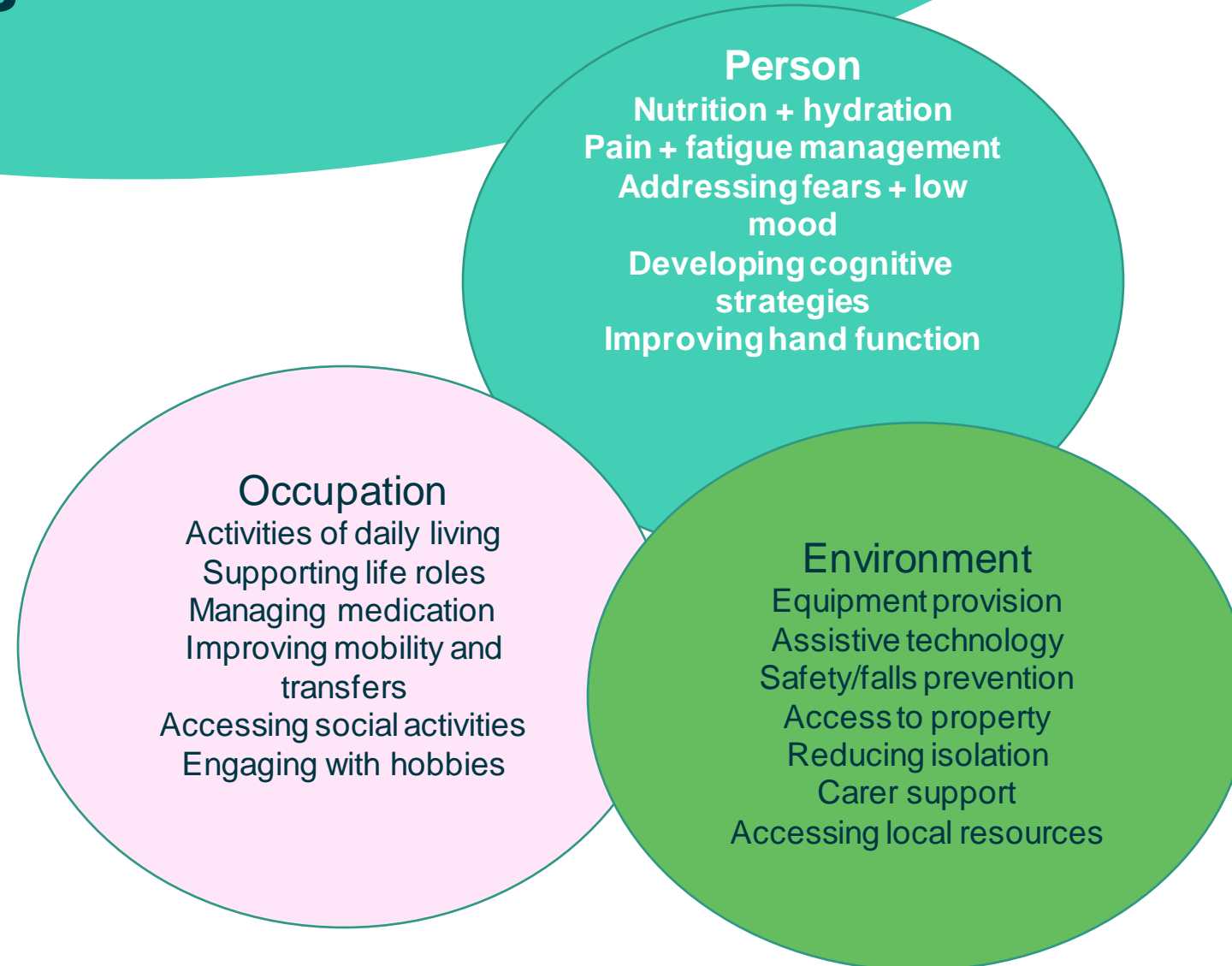


What do occupational therapists do in primary care?

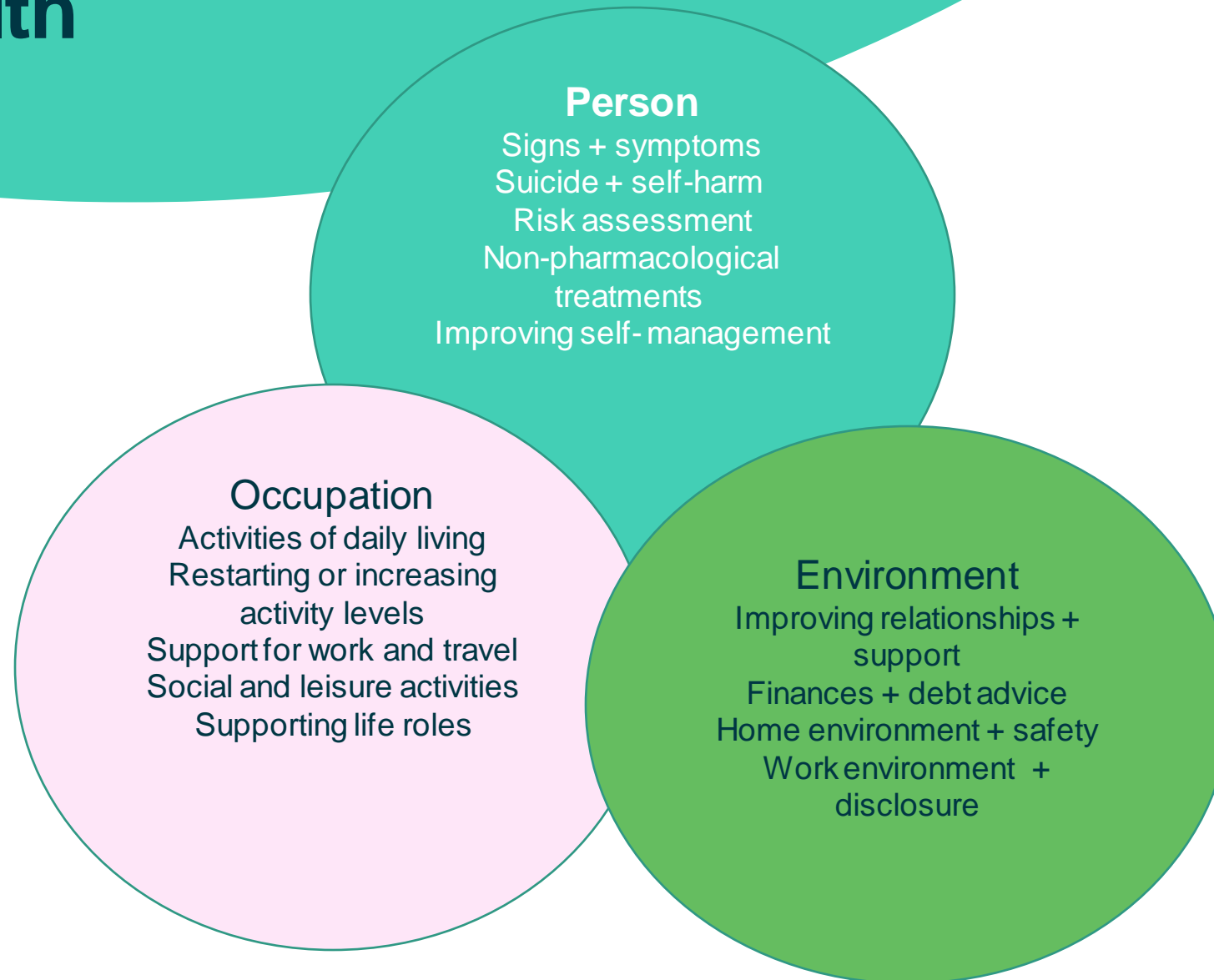
These are several key patients that can be directly triaged to first contact occupational therapists, without having to see a GP first:

- Adults with mental health problems
- Older adults with frailty related problems
- Working age adults requesting fit notes

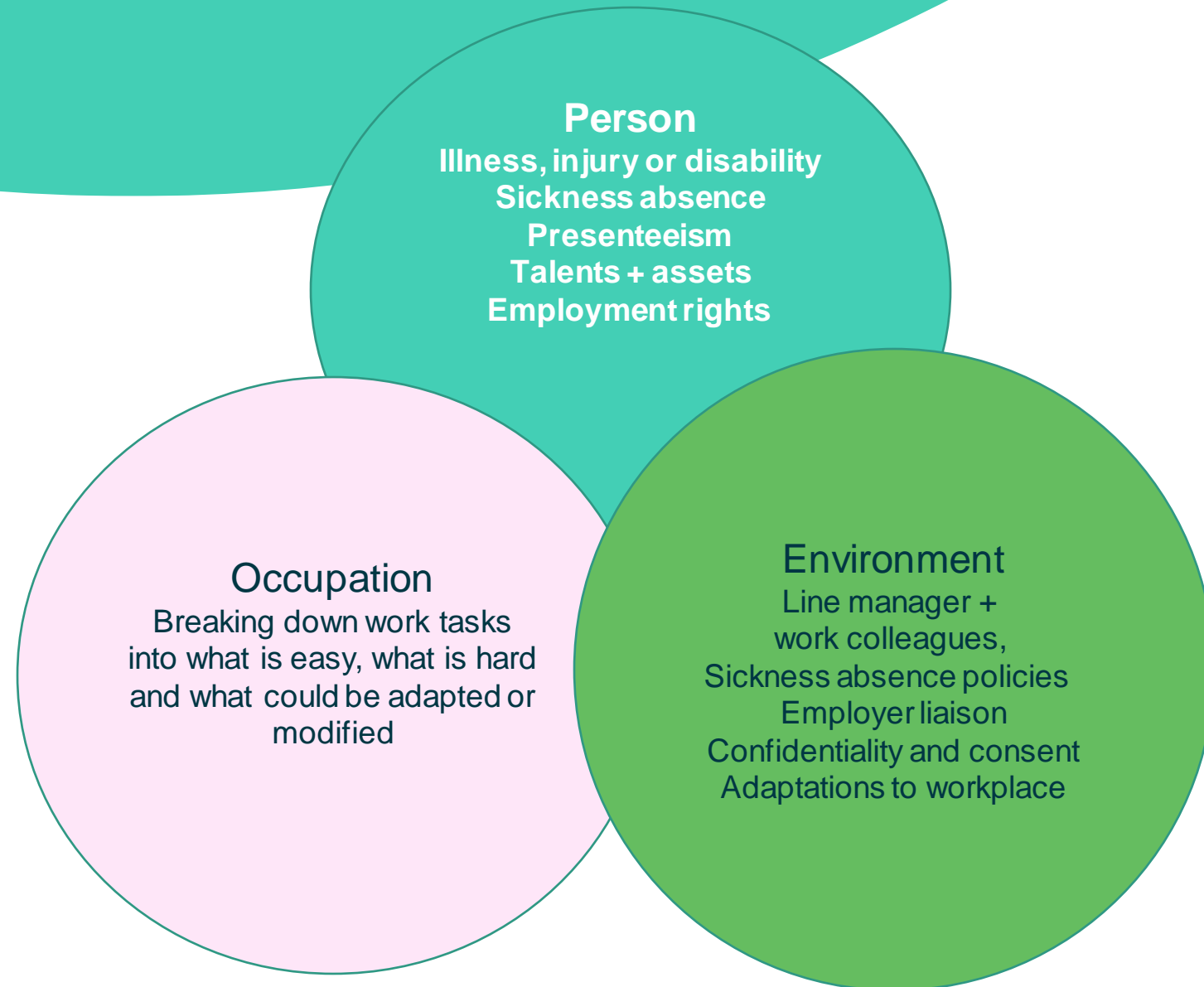
Occupational therapy and older adults



Occupational therapy and mental health



Occupational therapy and work



What's their impact?

Improved access, decreased demand. In Lanarkshire, 55% of patients had fewer GP appointments. 97% improved their quality of life and 88% their activities of daily living and functional outcomes.

Improved functioning and activity levels. In Pembrokeshire, 67% of patients referred to primary care occupational therapists showed improvement in their everyday function and home safety.

Improved independence. In Sheffield, all frail patients seen in 12 months by an occupational therapist achieved their functional independence goals. 38% achieved more than they expected and 21% achieved their best outcome.

Improved health and lifestyle skills. In Glasgow, an occupational therapy primary care mental health service saw 61% improvements in self-management, a 45% increase in activities of daily living, a 38% increase in employability and a 39% reduction in GP appointments.

Improved quality of life and mental wellbeing. In Sussex, occupational therapy input into a primary care frailty team that included group interventions, gave 69% of patients' quality of life improvements on standardised measures such as the EQ5D (EuroQol).

Improved cost savings. In Yorkshire, a proactive occupational therapy service for older adults delivered over six months made cost savings of £767 204.

Views of GPs and patients

I think its brilliant. I would go as far as to say it's the best thing I've done. I feel really proud of the service. I think it fulfils an unmet need. GP

I didn't really know what an OT did- now I do, I can't do without one...I thought it was just handrails and toilet aids. I didn't realise it was so holistic. GP

I get to stop pulling my hair out -it was frustrating because you could see somebody had these needs and you were just directing them to the internet. GP

She's been nothing but a help to me. She's there to listen and to help. She comes up with suggestions...all these things make a difference. They keep people like me who don't want to be a burden -I've been independent...I want to do stuff for myself. Patient

Experiences of OTs in primary care

RCOT research across England, Wales and Scotland reported high levels of job satisfaction linked to ability to provide early interventions and holistic care.

Support needed for OTs making the transition from working in secondary to primary care – very different environments and ways of working. OTs need to be prepared and have the ability to deal with undifferentiated diagnosis and lone working.

Time needed to establish new roles and educate the system about the occupational therapy role.

Need to build capacity in primary care to collect evidence and outcomes.

Need to address disparities in terms and conditions across primary and secondary care.

Further resources

RCOT [Primary care webpage](#) and network

[Lanarkshire](#) first area to have universal coverage.

[Primary Care Sheffield](#)

[South Pembrokeshire](#) Primary Care Cluster

Primary care occupational therapy service in [Somerset](#).

Occupational therapists in primary care in [Yorkshire](#).

[North Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#) mental health case studies.

A [scoping review](#) of occupational therapy in primary care was carried out in January 2023.

Get in touch for more information and resources about occupational therapy in primary care.

