Use of the Term Occupational Physiotherapist

Joint Position Statement from the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) and the College of Occupational Therapists (COT)

**Key Points**

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) and the College of Occupational Therapists (COT) ask members not to use the term ‘Occupational Physiotherapist’ as the term occupational physiotherapist implies a joint qualification and could be perceived as misleading.

The professional bodies expect their members to describe themselves in ways that maximise clarity and minimise confusion for the recipients, consumers and purchases of their services.

Both physiotherapists and occupational therapists have a valuable role to play in delivering services that are focused on the health and well-being needs of those seeking to return to purposeful activity and the working population. The active involvement of our professions can make a significant contribution to meeting identified UK government priorities in this area.

**Physiotherapists' and occupational therapists' role in the field of vocational rehabilitation areas**

Physiotherapists' use of the term ‘occupational’ describes chartered physiotherapists’ professional activity to deliver services to individuals, groups and organisations relating to occupational health and well-being within individuals’ employment or work activity. It is used to describe particular professional expertise within occupational health and vocational rehabilitation, by preventing sickness absence and facilitating sustainable return to work and in-work activity.

Occupational therapists also work in vocational rehabilitation. As experts in occupation and purposeful activity, occupational therapists help individuals to maximise and retain employment opportunities through occupational analysis and therapeutic interventions both in clinical settings and in the workplace. Through an approach focused on ‘occupation’, occupational therapists help individuals to access or return to employment, prevent workplace illness and injury and develop capacity and therefore facilitate job retention.
Use of title

Both ‘occupational therapist’ and ‘physiotherapist’ are protected titles under the Health Professions Order 2001. To aid clarity and understanding, some members of both professions use additional descriptors to identify the domain of practice in which they have developed specialist knowledge and skills (e.g. ‘neurological occupational therapist’ and ‘paediatric physiotherapist’).

The CSP and COT encourage their respective members to consider carefully how they convey their specialism to potential and actual users and purchasers of their services in order to maximise understanding and minimise confusion.

Use of ‘occupational’

As the adjectival descriptor in the protected title for the occupational therapy profession, the term ‘occupational’ relates to the core focus of occupational therapists’ practice.

The use of the term occupational physiotherapist provides scope for confusion, giving rise to some commissioners and service users mistakenly gaining the impression that practitioners are qualified as both physiotherapist and occupational therapist. In response, the CSP and the COT ask members not to use the term ‘Occupational Physiotherapist’ as the term occupational physiotherapist could be misleading. Alternative possibilities are to use the descriptor ‘occupational health physiotherapist’, ‘physiotherapist (occupational health)’ or similar - i.e. to include occupational health, rather than just the word ‘occupational’ on its own within the descriptor.

Regulatory body expectations of the members’ conduct

The HCPC requirements relating to the two professions make clear that individual physiotherapists and occupational therapists have a duty to adhere to the Standards of conduct, performance and ethics (2016) which includes the requirement to ‘make sure that any promotional activities are accurate and are not likely to mislead’. (Standard 9.3)


Summary

The CSP and COT expect their members to undertake the following:

- Convey clear and accurate messages to service users (patients / clients), organisations and the public on their contribution to occupational health, vocational rehabilitation.

- Make appropriate use of adjectives to describe their area of specialism to prospective and actual users and purchasers of their services.

- Ensure clarity about the particular, yet complementary roles that occupational therapists and chartered physiotherapists play in meeting individual, group and organisational needs within occupational health and fitness to work initiatives.