

Occupational Therapy - Profession specific descriptor for registered professionals and support workers

An Occupational Therapist helps people of all ages overcome challenges completing everyday tasks or activities – “occupations”. Occupational Therapists see beyond diagnoses and limitations to hopes and aspirations. They look at relationships between the activities people do every day – their occupations – alongside the challenges they face and their environment. Then, they create a plan of goals and adjustments targeted at achieving a specific set of activities. The plan is practical, realistic, and personal to the patient as an individual, to help them achieve the breakthroughs needed to elevate their everyday life. This support can give people a renewed sense of purpose. It can also open new opportunities and change the way people feel about the future.

Wider Determinants

Occupational Therapists and support workers can support employment, vocational rehabilitation, and facilitating individuals with health and disability issues to support them to gain and stay in work. They do this through increased awareness of work as a health outcome, being aware of the impact good work has on good health (bad work on bad health), facilitating discussions with employers and employees to develop health in work plans to ensure a proactive approach to the individuals health and aspects of their job that keeps them well, also aspects that may have a negative impact during periods of poor health (especially mental health). Occupational Therapists also utilise the AHP Health and Work report to make recommendations to support employees to remain at or return to work, perhaps with adjustments, where advisable to do so. Occupational Therapy support workers also provide AHP health and work reports to support reasonable accommodations in the workplace, assisting the employer and employee to develop well in work plans. This area of Occupational Therapy work has a focus on health promotion and lifestyle management to maximise an individual's skills, abilities, and interests to find, secure and retain their employment regardless of their health and or disability.

Occupational Therapists' holistic approach ensures the patient's social context is considered as part of their health assessment. They support patients with issues relating to factors such as health or digital literacy, poor housing, financial difficulties or safeguarding concerns through referral processes or signposting to the appropriate agencies and resources. They also support people to stay in work or return to work more quickly. This positively impacts the individual's financial situation, bringing savings for businesses and the wider economy by reduced days lost to sickness. In addition, being in work supports positive ongoing physical and mental health.

Occupational therapists carry out assessments of people's fitness to drive for people who need or want to get back to driving, allowing them to access work, education, social connections etc. Occupational Therapists in the fire service carry out risk assessments for the environment and support the fire service in providing services for people who are at increased risk of fire and poor health outcomes. These services supported people in feeling safer in their homes.

Health Improvement

Occupational Therapists work with vulnerable groups, particularly with people experiencing health inequalities, to try to support them individually with the provision of healthcare to support their health and wellbeing and quality of life.

Occupational Therapists and support workers routinely utilise the Make Every Contact Count (MECC) approach in their core practice. They use routine interactions to deliver brief interventions to encourage health improvement relating to risky health behaviors for example, smoking, alcohol, physical inactivity. Occupational Therapists also practice social prescribing where they refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services to address people's needs in a holistic way and support people to take greater control of their own health.

Occupational Therapists support people by promoting individual independence through the provision of rehabilitation and assistive equipment or adapting the home to ensure that people can continue to live there. This can contribute to improved physical and mental health and wellbeing and quality of life. e.g., give perching stool so person can make own tea even though unable to stand in kitchen etc, for example, getting up to make tea encourages movement which prevents physical deterioration.

Occupational Therapists contribute to housing adaptation work, for individuals and for social care and housing managers. They work as part of building complexes or wider building projects, supporting vulnerable communities, by making sure that the buildings are suitable for people and can support people's needs. Occupational Therapists are leading the development of local networks to connect people to the voluntary and third sector for support with their physical and mental health. In some areas, clinicians use databases of online tools and available services locally, embedded into a clinical template to make referral and signposting quicker and simpler.

Population Healthcare

Occupational Therapy support workers work with a variety of clients including elderly care, medical, surgery, trauma and orthopedics and palliative. My job role contributes to population healthcare by supporting patient's recovery following illness/ surgery & short periods of rehabilitation. Promoting independence to continue daily living tasks following surgery is also part of the therapy support worker role they affect the health & wellbeing of others by supporting progression following illness/surgery, which can then improve a client's physical & mental health. Occupational Therapy support workers can provide support and information about where clients can access community services such as friendship groups, meal service providers, pendant alarms, falls prevention, day center & leisure activities, and can provide further details about the management of long-term health conditions.

Occupational Therapy support workers can prevent hospital readmission by providing call back services for people who have been discharged from hospital and they also provide rehabilitation for adults over 18 after hospital admission for falls or general health decline. They help patients to achieve their goals at regaining independence previously had before illness or admission.

Transition teams in social care often include Occupational Therapists, helping people transitioning between services, for example, NHS involvement, social care involvement or education involvement.

Health Protection

Occupational Therapists have played a key part in the national vaccination programme, delivering vaccinations to staff and patients in their local populations. Health and safety is also key element for Occupational Therapists. They provide safety advice to patients and can assist them with physical elements of environmental safety at work and home. Occupational Therapists provide support with moving and handling for patients and their carers, to prevent injury and falls. They also provide equipment (such as hoists) or make environmental changes to allow people to get around a house safely and this also protects carers from injury.

Occupational Therapists and support workers monitor infection control in the populations they work with and can provide equipment to prevent infection, for example from pressure sores, by providing pressure relieving equipment.

Occupational Therapists carry out preventative checks to prevent the need for additional health services or admissions to hospital. Part of this involves screening for preventative measures which could be put in place to help the patient.

Occupational Therapists – Wider Reading and Case Study Examples

Health Protection

- Occupational therapy leadership within the Fire Service to reduce fire risk and address health and wellbeing in vulnerable communities

Wider Determinants

- Addressing occupational deprivation as a way to reduce health inequalities
- Occupational Therapy has a sustainability action plan to promote greener practice and contribute to wider health
- Occupational Therapy report on health equity
- Small change Big impact' campaign
- Occupational Therapy – Social Prescribing Active Signposting
- Occupational Therapy Children – Social Prescribing Active Signposting

Population Healthcare

- Occupational Therapists work with condition specific charities to provide treatment and support for people and their carers
- Provision of Therapeutic Boxing for Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit

Health Improvement

- Occupational Therapy and Social Prescribing
- Housing adaptations report
- Sport for Confidence and Stay Connected: Creating an online physical activity service
- Occupational Therapy Community 360 Social Prescribing
- Occupational Therapy – AHP Prescriber Social Prescribing
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