



Press Release: NORTHERN IRELAND

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-- EMBARGOED UNTIL 0001 on 13/07/17 --

ROYAL COLLEGE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS WARNS OF “DEHUMANISING EFFECT” OF CARE SERVICES

The Royal College of Occupational Therapists has launched its second substantive report, ‘Living, Not Existing: Putting prevention at the heart of care for older people in Northern Ireland’, as part of its *Improving Lives Saving Money* campaign, to tackle unprecedented pressure on the social care system.

In its report, the Royal College, which represents 32,000 occupational therapists working across the health and social care sector in the UK and 1000 in Northern Ireland, calls for an end to the post code lottery in access to occupational therapy in Northern Ireland. This will give older people back their dignity and help the Health and Social Care system in Northern Ireland work better and be more efficient.

Centre-stage in the report are a series of recommendations that would see Local Commissioning Groups identify a named person to action and report on outcomes in three key areas:

1. Health and Social Care Trusts, GPs and GP Federations must **design services to make sure occupational therapists are based *within* primary care** to delay or prevent the need for care and support.
 - *Occupational therapists should be based within GP practices or multidisciplinary integrated teams embedded in GP surgeries, so that primary care patients have timely, direct access to occupational therapy.*
 - *Care coordination roles should be open to occupational therapists.*
2. The Public Health Agency, Local Commissioning Groups and Integrated Care Partnerships must work together to ensure that **person-centred approaches are developed in social and community care using occupational therapists** to ensure all older people live independently for as long as possible in their communities.
 - *Occupational therapists should be able to take on leadership roles to provide expertise and mentoring to providers of community services as well as improving accessibility to resources and services for those with complex needs.*
 - *Occupational therapists skills to be used to train carers and community workers to encourage a person centred and enabling approach to care and support*
3. The Department for Communities, local councils and community planners and Health and Social Care Trusts should formally **develop partnership agreements across local housing, health and social care sectors to ensure all older people have access to occupational therapy**, irrespective of their social-economic conditions and location.
 - *Resourcing occupational therapy services sufficiently so that they can take referrals from all sections of society.*

- *Providing access points to occupational therapy advice for community teams such as home care as well as providing public information on ageing well and adapting the home to meet changing needs.*
- *A dedicated occupational therapist to provide a point of reference and expertise on housing adaptations for disabled people in each Trust.*

Kate Lesslar, Northern Ireland Policy Officer at the Royal College of Occupational Therapists, said:

“We do not want a society where people talk of simply existing and not truly living. Too many health and social care services tell people what social care they will get based on what it is most efficient to provide, instead of asking what they really need, leading to costs arising elsewhere in the Health and Social Care system. The Royal College of Occupational Therapists argues that doing the right thing for individuals can actually reduce their need for expensive long-term care by enabling them to stay as active, independent and safe as possible in the community.

“Occupational therapists are in a unique position as the only professional group qualified to work across health and social care services, allowing them to understand how people are already managing the consequences of frailty and ill health inside and outside of hospitals. Our new report shows that in Northern Ireland there are some really innovative examples where the intelligent deployment of occupational therapy services have enhanced the lives of older people through better care whilst delivering significant cost savings for the tax payer.”

The evidence base for the report was taken from a series of case studies that demonstrate how, with the enhanced support of occupational therapists, older people can receive better and tailored support that saves money for the tax payer. Two cases from the report include:

Case Study 1 – Dementia GPS service at the Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Occupational therapists assess and prescribe the suitability of this award-winning GPS service for people with dementia. The aim is to maintain and promote independence. The occupational therapy team take into consideration the person’s capacity to give consent; their personal history; and the difference of perception of risk between carers, the person with dementia and professionals.

- The average cost of a dementia service (memory assessment) comes to £1,218 per person and the cost of a GPS is approximately £500 per year, an **investment of under £2000**.
- In contrast there is a risk of losing independence which then leads to earlier dependency and the need for traditional forms of care. **This would relieve costs such as those of a home care worker at £20 per hour; residential care costs which average at £653 per week and a typical non-elective hospital stay at £615.**
- In terms of outcomes, the person with dementia experiences improvement in their health and wellbeing through being physically active and independent, maintaining their routine and continuing an activity that they value. The GPS lessens carer anxiety and provides reassurance that the person with dementia is able to continue with a previous interest.

Case Study 2 – Falls Prevention Services, Western Health and Social Care Trust

Falls Prevention Services are run by the Western Health and Social Care Trust to help elderly people better prevent and cope with falls.

- The occupational therapist carries out home assessments for people over 65 with a history of falls and typically sees 16-18 new people per month. The occupational therapist

completes a functional assessment, screens for home hazards and completes an assessment of falls history and fear of falls.

- Training based on the *Falls are Preventable* leaflet has been delivered to approximately 2,000 older people in the last 4 years by a Health Promotion Officer. Occupational therapists also provide training to care home staff on falls prevention. To date, over 150 healthcare workers in the Western Trust have received training on falls prevention.
- A **Community Falls Prevention 'Stepping On' Programme**, an evidence based exercise programme, was run for 9 weeks in community settings throughout the Western Trust. Data collated from a sample group of participants identified **a reduction in the number of admissions to A&E from 18 to 7 and from 31 to 10 visits to a GP, a total reduction in need for acute services of 65%.**

- ENDS -

NOTES TO EDITORS

- For further information or to arrange media visits, contact Edward Jones at edward@gkstrategy.com or on 020 7340 1150.
- The report 'Living Not Existing: Putting Prevention at the Heart of care for older people' is part of the *Improving Lives, Saving Money* campaign by the Royal College of Occupational Therapists. More information on the campaign can be found at: cotimprovinglives.com
- The publication of the report is accompanied by a moving film showing the stark reality of being dependent on social care faced by many older and vulnerable people by showing different realities of care. One reality shows what life can be like for many older people, as simply passive recipient of care. The other shows how occupational therapist involvement can result in the best care that empowers older people.
- The report's recommendations seek to realise the objective of the *Health and Wellbeing 2026 - Delivering Together* strategy which advocates moving away from the traditional delivery of services to support a new model of person-centred care.
- **About Community Care Services:** Community care services manage long-term conditions and many take place in people's homes. Teams of nurses and occupational therapists coordinate and deliver an extensive and varied range of care services care. ([NHS Confederation](#))
- **Further information relating to housing adaptations can be found in:** [Department for Social Development and Department of Health, 'Social Services and Public Safety \(2016\) Inter-departmental review of housing adaptations services: final report and action plan 2016' \(Belfast: Northern Ireland Housing Executive\)](#)
- A new approach is needed as there is a major demographic shift in the population of Northern Ireland. The number of people aged over 65 increasing by 42% from 2010 to 2025. ([King's Fund, 'Integrated care in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales'](#))
- The latest figures from the Health Survey in Northern Ireland indicate that 53% of people over 65 in Northern Ireland have a limiting longstanding illness and that 68% have a longstanding illness. ([Office of the Minister and Deputy First Minister, 'A profile of older people in Northern Ireland - annual update'](#)) Health and care services must adapt to address this.
- Analysis of the Community Falls Prevention 'Stepping On' Programme can be found in the document: [Public Health Agency \(2016\) 'Stepping on' falls prevention project evaluation. Belfast: Northern Ireland.](#)