

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL MONDAY MAY 14TH 2018

Prioritise prevention and early intervention in mental health services, says new Royal College of Occupational Therapists' report

Against a backdrop of increasing pressures on mental health services in Northern Ireland, a new report from the Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) highlights the importance of prevention and early intervention in tackling mental health issues.

Current statistics show that 85% of people first disclose mental health problems to their GP – yet less than 5% of mental health professionals such as occupational therapists work in GP services. **This means that the majority of people with mental health problems have to reach crisis before they can access any kind of help.**

'Getting My Life Back: Occupational therapy promoting mental health and wellbeing in Northern Ireland', the latest report from the RCOT's *Improving Lives, Saving Money* Campaign, reveals a range of innovative occupational therapy services that focus on prevention and early intervention in mental health services. The report shows that occupational therapy has life-changing effects on people with mental health conditions; from stress and anxiety to depression, psychosis and self-harm.

The RCOT recommend occupational therapy as one of the lead professions in designing and delivering services for the future, in four key areas:

1. Occupational therapists should be routinely helping young people with mental health problems to achieve their full educational potential
2. Occupational therapists should be supporting people with mental health issues into employment
3. Occupational therapists should be involved in plans to improve the physical health of people with serious mental health problems, incorporating and promoting healthy occupations
4. Occupational therapists should lead innovative service delivery that improves access to mental health support in primary care.

Quotes:

RCOT Chief Executive Julia Scott

"The evidence is clear, we can no longer afford to delay addressing people's mental health issues, and it is increasingly obvious that current services are woefully inadequate. What we propose is a refocusing of the way mental health services are delivered, focusing on prevention and early intervention, rather than waiting for people to reach crisis point. We must enable patients to live well and independently with mental health problems and ensure they can take part in the healthy occupations that are vital to wellbeing."

Richard Pengelly, the Permanent Secretary and HSC Chief Executive, Department of Health

"Mental health and wellbeing is one of the priority areas the Department of Health in Northern Ireland is focusing on, as detailed in the document 'Health and Wellbeing 2026 - Delivering Together'. The Northern Ireland Government has also listed increasing employment as one of its strategic outcomes.

Mental health issues can be barriers to education, development and career opportunities, therefore, occupational therapists should be routinely deployed to address employment needs, when working with people with mental health problems; this includes self-esteem and social interactions.

The link between severe mental ill-health and poor physical health is one of the greatest health inequalities in Northern Ireland. This report clearly demonstrates how occupational therapists are leading in innovative mental health service design, to reduce the pressure on primary care and ensure timely interventions. It particularly targets increasing the participation of people with a disability and those living in areas of greater social need. Each district Council is working closely with local organisations to provide opportunities to get involved in sports and activities at accessible times and places.”

Paula Bradley, Chair of the Health Committee and DUP MLA North Belfast Constituency

“Mental illness is the single largest cause of ill health and disability in Northern Ireland. This report and its recommendations are particularly welcome as they illustrate the importance of accessing occupational therapy at key transition points in life, and show the hugely positive outcomes possible enabling people to live fulfilling lives. Occupational therapists are committed to moving away from traditional models of medicalised practice to one which focuses more on the everyday concerns of people and their families. These concerns are frequently about the most important determinants of health and life expectancy, such as education, employment and social support. I therefore look forward to seeing how this report translates into practice for the benefit of our population.”

Sir Michael Marmot, Director, Institute of Health Equity

“Education, employment, and income are key social determinants that affect mental health. This report from the Royal College of Occupational Therapists focuses on increasing people’s chances to do well in education and employment and highlights the importance of creating opportunities to engage in healthy behaviours. To improve the mental health of the nation, these social determinants must be addressed and healthcare delivery should be rebalanced to help achieve this end. The Royal College puts forward recommendations to highlight the role of occupational therapists in this important sea change. It is a most welcome report.”

~ENDS~

For more information:

Helen Merrills – Media Relations Manager

Helen.merrills@rcot.co.uk

07878 871480

Notes to editors:

About the Royal College of Occupational Therapists

The Royal College of Occupational Therapists is the professional body for occupational therapy representing over 32,000 occupational therapists across the UK. Occupational therapists provide life changing support to people managing illness, injuries and a wide range of physical and mental health conditions. Uniquely, they enable people to carry out daily activities ('occupations') which are essential for health and happiness. This vital care helps people recover and build new skills to enjoy a full and independent life.

About occupational therapy and mental health support

*Occupational therapy builds mental health support around what really matters to the person, such as being able to complete their education, cook a family meal, go to work, or play sport. The RCOT has found that overcoming

barriers to these activities is often the key to supporting early onset or short-term mental health issues, or achieving better quality of life for those with more serious, long-term conditions.

About *Improving Lives Saving Money*

Getting My Life Back is the latest report from the RCOT's *Improving Lives, Saving Money* Campaign which has highlighted the value of occupational therapy in a number of public services including hospitals, social care, fire and rescue services, prison services and GP practices. *Improving Lives, Saving Money* draws attention not only to the effectiveness of occupational therapy but also the cost saving and value for money occupational therapy brings to services.