



## **The role of occupational therapists working in mental health**

### **POSITION STATEMENT**

## **Background**

This position statement has been developed in consultation with occupational therapists working in the mental health sector throughout New Zealand. It aims to communicate to key stakeholders (consumers, purchasers, employers and other professionals) the roles, areas of practice, and key issues for the development of occupational therapy within the mental health sector.

This position statement should be read in conjunction with the following: Occupational Therapy Board Scopes of Practice for Occupational Therapists (2003), OT Board Competencies for Registration (2000), Occupational Therapy Process Standards (2003), NZAOT position statement 'Occupational Therapists as Case Managers in Mental Health' (2005), the Ministry of Health 'Recovery Competencies for Mental Health Workers' (2001), and relevant legislation (including the Health Practitioners Competency Assurance Act (2003)).

## **Philosophy of Occupational Therapy Practice in Mental Health**

Occupational Therapists in Mental Health use a client centred recovery focused approach to work with individuals, groups, organisations, communities and may also work with policy makers to support opportunities for or remove barriers to participation in occupation. Occupational Therapists believe in the power of participation in occupation to facilitate and maintain good mental health, and promote recovery for people experiencing mental ill health. The practice of occupational therapy should be based on current and relevant theory, research and other evidence. Occupational Therapists enable people to regain lost abilities or to develop new skills and interests. Mental illness can impact on people's ability to involve themselves in the things they like to do and need to do to make their lives meaningful and satisfying – these are a person's occupations.

Occupational Therapists may work with a person and their family to address their work, leisure and self care needs. This may include developing habits, routines, skills and resources so that a person is living the life they want to in the environments of their choice.

## **Key tasks**

Occupational Therapists working in the mental health sector use occupation as the primary modality to restore health and wellbeing.

The following are the key tasks of an occupational therapist in this sector. It must be acknowledged that the tasks performed will vary from workplace to workplace. It must also be acknowledged that occupational therapy practice is guided by the occupational therapy process standards.

In collaboration with a service user the occupational therapist may:

- Assess and analyse a person's participation in occupation and their needs
- Utilise purposeful occupations to engage and provide intervention to service users
- Identify and utilise appropriate resources to meet service users occupational needs in the context of their physical, social, emotional, cultural and spiritual environments
- Co-ordinate resources to maintain/enhance the person's participation in occupations.
- Evaluate intervention outcomes together with service user satisfaction and modify interventions as necessary to enhance the recovery process
- Assess mental state, risk and provide input into a diagnostic process

## **Areas of practice**

Occupational therapists in New Zealand mental health services may be employed in a variety of settings. These include inpatient units (acute and rehabilitation), community mental health teams, day programmes/facilities, non-government organisations in either community settings, residential services or day programmes, needs assessment services, crisis or mental health emergency services.

Occupational therapists should only accept referrals for occupational therapy specific needs, or for service users whose needs would be met or recovery enhanced by occupational therapy intervention.

Some practice areas pose a challenge for therapists to work within the occupational therapy scope of practice (e.g. emergency teams). NZAOT acknowledges the value of having occupational therapy services in a widening variety of areas not traditionally serviced by occupational therapy. NZAOT encourages therapists to ensure their practice is guided by the philosophy and principles of occupational therapy, and that the focus consistently includes occupational assessment, intervention and recommendations.

## Bibliography

DuFresne, G. M. (1991). Statement : *The Occupational Therapist as Case Manager*. The American Journal of Occupational Therapy. 45(12), 1065-1066.

Krupa, T. Clark, C. (April 1995). *Occupational Therapists as Case Managers: Responding to current approaches to community mental health service delivery*. Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy. 60(1), 16-22.

Greaves, A.J. King, R. Yellowlees, P. Spence, S. Lloyd, C. (August 2002). *The Competence of Mental Health Occupational Therapists*. British Journal of Occupational Therapy. 65(8), 381-386.

Griffin, S. (1996). *Occupational Therapists as healthcare team members: A review of the literature*. Australian Occupational Therapy Journal. 43, 83-94.

Hughes, J. (January 2001). *Occupational Therapy in Community Mental Health Teams: a Continuing Dilemma? Role Theory offers an explanation*. British Journal of Occupational Therapy. 64(1), 34-39.

Lemorie, L. Paul, S. (2001). *Professional Expertise of Community Based Occupational Therapists*. Occupational Therapy in Health Care, (The Haworth Press Inc), 31(3/4), 33-50.

Lloyd, C. Kanowski, H. Samra, P. (May 1998). *Developing Occupational Therapy Services within an Integrated Mental Health Service*. British Journal of Occupational Therapy. 61(5), 214-220.

Lloyd, C. King, R. McKenna, K. (March 2004). *Generic versus specialist clinical work roles of occupational therapists and social workers in mental health*. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 38(3), 119- 124.

Lloyd, C. McWha, L. King, R. (2003). *An investigation of occupational therapy practice in New Zealand mental health services*. New Zealand Journal of Occupational Therapy, 50 (2), 9-16.

Taylor, A. Rubin, R. (February 1999). *How do occupational therapists define their role in a community mental health setting?* British Journal of Occupational Therapy, 62 (2), 59-63.