Reablement: The added value of Occupational Therapists

The College of Occupational Therapists’ believes that occupational therapists are an essential part of the skill mix required to make reablement services successful.

Occupational therapists are leading and coordinating reablement services throughout the United Kingdom. Occupational therapists can improve reablement outcomes and cost savings, and are seen as core members of the reablement team. The added expertise and involvement of occupational therapists in reablement teams contribute to successful reablement services (Rabiee and Glendinning 2010).

Research is demonstrating a convincing case for reablement services. A study funded by the National Institute for Health Research School for Social Care Research (NIHR SSCR 2013) provided local evidence that by the time they were discharged from reablement services, between 50–90% of older people (depending on the local authority concerned) needed less or no support than when they initially contacted the service (NIHR SSCR 2013 p4). That local evidence also revealed that many of those individual’s personal outcomes were met. The findings reflect those of research which has shown that reablement services can both improve outcomes and lead to the more cost efficient use of resources (Francis et al 2011). Occupational therapists likewise have a compelling contribution to make to reablement services.

How do occupational therapists add value to Reablement services?

The following are considered the key areas where occupational therapists add value:

- Occupational therapists’ unique skills and training in all aspects of rehabilitation, recovery, and enablement make them ideal in delivering training for support and care staff to embed a reabling culture and ethos in their work.
- Occupational therapists’ competencies in assessment and goal setting, together with their knowledge of the medical, physical, emotional and cognitive impact of disability and injury, can ensure that reablement is tailored to an individual’s needs to maintain function and independence (SCIE/COT 2011).
- Where reablement has stalled or not progressed as expected, occupational therapists can contribute to a case review, recommending specialised programmes to assist in improving recovery and independence.
- Occupational therapists can pay a vital role in assisting in ongoing reablement for individuals with complex conditions (SCIE 2012).
- Maintaining the outcomes of reablement is an important factor if savings and recovery are to be sustainable. Occupational therapist work with individuals to re-engage with their local community, networks and leisure activities to reduce social isolation and maintain health and wellbeing. Occupational therapy improves reablement outcomes.

Other areas where occupational therapists skills can assist reablement services are:
Fast tracking equipment and adaptations (Rabiee and Glendinning 2011).
Signposting to other support services and information.
Providing information and interventions to prevent falls.
Use of standardised assessments that measure outcomes and improvement.

**Key Evidence**

Three key documents have outlined the benefits of involving occupational therapists in reablement services (COT 2011, Francis et al 2011, SCIE/COT 2011).

The examples below highlight further specific areas of evidence:

- In planning and delivering reablement, a strong priority should be placed on the involvement of occupational therapy (SCIE 2010).
- Whatever model of involvement is established, it is crucial that occupational therapists’ expertise can be rapidly accessed (Glendinning et al 2010).
- The input of occupational therapists is highly valued for training care workers to assess for smaller pieces of equipment, thereby reducing some unnecessary delays (Rabiee and Glendinning 2011).
- Norfolk County Council’s reablement scheme led by occupational therapists found that care hours were reduced for those going on to longer term care by 90% (Allen and Glasby 2010).
- Housing adaptations facilitated by occupational therapists reduce the need for daily visits and reduce or remove costs for home care (savings range from £1,200 to £29,000 a year) (Heywood and Turner 2007).
- Where occupational therapists are central to the reablement team, there is evidence that care workers value the close working relationships and regular advice available from occupational therapists (McLeod et al 2009).
- Occupational therapists are well placed to provide enhanced training to home care staff to deliver efficient and effective reablement services (Glendinning and Newbronner 2008).

The College strongly recommend that commissioners and managers of adult health and social care services fully acknowledge the added value of occupational therapists to reablement, and ensure that occupational therapists are integrally involved in leading and delivering reablement services.

**Definition of Terms**

Across health and social care the terms reablement, enablement, rehabilitation, and intermediate care tend to be used loosely, and the boundaries between the services they refer to are often blurred.

**Reablement** - aims to help people accommodate their illness or condition by learning or relearning the skills necessary for daily living (Care Services Efficiency Delivery Programme, Homecare Reablement Workstream 2007).

**Enablement** – to provide someone with adequate power, means, opportunity, or authority (to do something) (HarperCollins 1992).

**Rehabilitation** – A process aiming to restore personal autonomy in those aspects of daily living considered most relevant by patients or service users and their family carers (Sinclair and Dickinson 1998).

**Intermediate care** – the primary function of intermediate care is to build up people’s confidence to cope once more with day to day activities. It serves as an extension to specialist clinical care and rehabilitation, but not as a substitute for it: quick access to specialist medical and other support when needed is vital (Audit Commission 2000).
Recovery - is about building a meaningful and satisfying life, as defined by the person themselves, whether or not there are ongoing or recurring symptoms or problems. Recovery represents a movement away from pathology, illness and symptoms to health, strength and wellness (Shepherd et al 2008).

References


College of Occupational Therapists (2011) Occupational Therapy Evidence - Fact Sheet: Occupational Therapists adding value within social Care. London: COT.


Social Care Institute for Excellence and College of Occupational Therapists (2011) Reablement: a key role for occupational therapists. At a glance Briefing 46. London: SCIE.

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<th>March 2013</th>
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<td>Lead group:</td>
<td>Director of Professional Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review date:</td>
<td>Reviewed February 2013 replaced December 2012 Edition</td>
</tr>
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<td>Country Relevance:</td>
<td>UK</td>
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