



Consultation on The role of the Registered Social Worker in Contributing to Better Outcomes for Scotland: Guidance for Local Authorities

Response from the College of Occupational Therapists

The College of Occupational Therapists (the College) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the role of the registered Social Worker in contributing to better outcomes for Scotland: Guidance for Local Authorities. As there are no set questions in the consultation, comments have been made under the headings of the specific sections of the document where the College considers it necessary to comment.

Introduction

The purpose of the document is to “highlight the role of social work in contributing ...” and the College suggests that it would be helpful to ensure clarity in the distinction between Social Work as a profession and Social Work as a department of a local authority, which includes registered Occupational Therapists i.e. registered with the Health Professions Council, and others.

The discussion about the contribution of Social Work as a profession is welcomed but cannot be considered in isolation. Although registered Occupational Therapists make up less than 2% of the workforce they deal with up to 40% of the referrals to social work (COT Position Statement: The value of occupational therapy and its contribution to adult social service users and their carers). There is a need for similar guidance for local authorities around the contribution of registered Occupational Therapists in order to ensure the best possible use of the valuable resource provided by registered Occupational Therapists in delivering better outcomes.

Context

The College recognises the positive contribution that the Social Work profession makes to the achievement of the National Outcomes as set by the Scottish Government. The College wishes to emphasise that there is much to be achieved by the Social Work profession working in partnership with the Occupational Therapy profession in pursuit of the National Outcomes.

While the consultation document highlights the National Outcomes which are core to Social Work, the College would highlight the following National Outcomes as also being core to Occupational Therapy:

- ❑ We realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for our people
- ❑ Our children have the best start in life and are ready to success
- ❑ We live longer, healthier lives
- ❑ We have tackled significant inequalities in Scottish society
- ❑ We have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk
- ❑ We have strong resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others



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- Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs

Social Work's Contribution & Function

The College acknowledges the contribution and function of Social Work, which has been written mainly for local authorities. Whilst it has been recognised in the consultation document that Social Workers cannot do this in isolation, it is important to emphasise at this point that Occupational Therapists employed by local authorities have the necessary education, skills and competencies to undertake all aspects of holistic assessment and care planning with individuals. This also includes the assessment and management of risk, which is often very complex.

Whilst it is acknowledged that there are circumstances where a Social Worker would be the professional of choice for undertaking particular pieces of work there are equally times where a registered Occupational Therapist employed by the local authority would be the professional of choice, and indeed times where both would be equally qualified.

The Role of the Registered Social Worker

Care and Protection

The College welcomes new measures to ensure that decisions regarding care and protection of vulnerable people are taken only by those who are competent to do so. While it is important that, for assurance of all involved, accountability for such important decisions should lie with a suitably qualified and trained professional, the College recognises that both registered Social Workers and registered Occupational Therapists can carry out these functions.

In particular, registered Occupational Therapists employed by a local authority are well placed to undertake the role of Council Officer as defined in the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007. In undertaking such functions, and notwithstanding the role of the Chief Social Work Officer, a registered Occupational Therapist should, where appropriate, retain accountability for:

- Carrying out enquiries, the investigation, and making recommendations where necessary as to whether or not an adult requires to be the subject of compulsory protection measures identified in the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act
- Implementing a risk management plan

In March 2008 the College, responded to the Consultation on the code of practice for part 1 of the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007 and Associated Regulations on performing Council Officer functions. At that time the College recommended that a competence framework be developed for all professionals involved in adult protection work. This would ensure a recognised level of competence across the various professional groups i.e. Social Work, Nursing, Occupational Therapy that may be involved in this area of work.

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College of
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Mental Health and Adults with Incapacity

The College acknowledges that mental health was the first area of practice within social work to reserve functions to social workers. Such functions include a range of duties as defined by the Mental Health (Care & Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 and the Adult with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000.

The College is firmly of the opinion that a wider range of professionals should be enabled to support individuals under Scottish mental health legislation in order to ensure continuity of care and best use of available professional skills. This has particular relevance for the Occupational Therapy profession, which has the second largest number of practitioners of any profession working within mental health services and whose practice is based on a social model of disability. The College would also wish to highlight the success of recent developments in England and Wales where Occupational Therapists are taking on the new roles of Responsible Clinician, previously the Responsible Medical Officer, and Approved Mental Health Professional, formerly the Approved Social Worker under the Mental Health Act 2007. A range of training opportunities have been made available to Occupational Therapists to support them in taking on these new roles.

Conclusion

The College would welcome the opportunity to discuss the contents of the consultation response further. Please contact:

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References

College of Occupational Therapists (2008). Position Statement: *The value of occupational therapy and its contribution to adult social service users and their carers*. London. COT

Link:

<http://www.cot.org.uk/MainWebSite/Resources/Document/The%20value%20of%20OT%20and%20its%20contribution.pdf>