Evaluation of a model of Occupational Therapy in primary care: a LOT to offer

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Pressures on primary care are well documented and change is required to meet the growing need for healthcare services. Occupational Therapists (OTs) are part of the multidisciplinary team offer to help GPs streamline their workload while meeting patient need.

This project is part of the Lanarkshire Primary Care Improvement Plan. One of its aims is to clarify the unique contribution of occupational therapy within primary care and develop a model of practice which can be rolled out across Lanarkshire and inform service development in other Scottish health boards.

How did we do it?
Using quality improvement methodology, we tested:
- awareness raising training for GPs and practice staff;
- occupational therapy criteria and referral pathways;
- standard operating procedure across two GP practices;
- data and measurement framework.

Evaluation of 288 patients referred over a 14-month period measured key performance indicators, including:
- patient functional and quality of life outcomes;
- patient and GP satisfaction;
- impact on GP workload.

What did we achieve?

55% of patients had fewer GP appointments after Occupational Therapy intervention than before.

96% improved satisfaction with chosen everyday roles

97% improved Quality Of Life

88% improved occupational performance in chosen everyday roles

Well informed
“She has put you in the sphere of your own age group...and you can go and find out whereas before I wasn’t involved in anything”

Consistent
“She knows what’s going on in my life and that now, and the way to cope with stuff.”

Personalised
“There were suggestions about things... Could you try that? Or have you thought of this? it was all, well, I’m here for you”

Flexible
“Patients have found it helpful to have a bit more time to discuss through issues and have some practical suggestions.”

Responsive
“The more we’ve seen, the broader the range of people we feel OT can benefit”

What patients and GPs said

Person-centred

What difference do Occupational Therapists make in primary care?

People who experience barriers to functioning due to mental and physical health conditions have access to streamlined support.

Comprehensive assessment and a focus on ‘what matters to you’ improves identification and resolution of a wide range of unmet needs.

Improved access to early intervention results in better compliance and shorter interventions.

Mental Health 97
Both 121
Physical Health 70

Number of patients referred with mental or physical conditions or both

Evaluation shows that the impact of this has been:
- reduction in need for referrals to secondary services;
- reduction in need for home care;
- reduced reliance on medication;
- reduced falls risks in older adults;
- reduced sickness absences and reliance on sickness benefits;
- reduced health inequalities; and
- improved carer wellbeing.

References