

POSTER ABSTRACT

Enhancing adult social care occupational therapists' engagement with research: cutting a new path to integrated interventions.

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Background: Workforce disparities between National Health Service and Adult Social Care (ASC) occupational therapists' (OT) engagement with research is longstanding with gaps in the occupational therapy evidence base for ASC. The profession is shifting practice interventions towards integrated prevention, but in a context of severe service demand and capacity challenges [1]. To ensure interventions are evidence informed, relevant and timely, OTs as registered practitioners are required to demonstrate research engagement despite these pressures.

Approach: This project established a co-production Advisory group of people drawing on care and support and worked with ASC OTs across the regions 14 local authorities, wider social work team and stakeholder groups such as funders and national bodies, to increase OT engagement with research. The project deployed the IMPACT (IMproving Adult social Care Together) model and methods to test and learn with regional OTs working in ASC contexts. The model defines practitioner, people drawing on care and support, and published evidence as equally important and all activities are co-designed.

An engagement phase was followed by a six-month activities phase (dissemination of evidence, focus groups, workshops and meetings), followed by co-creation of the new theory of change in readiness to be scaled and embedded nationally. A showcase conference was used to disseminate findings widely and celebrate the achievements.

Results: 1.Challenges

The survey respondents (57) highlighted little engagement with or confidence in using research. 51% of respondents stated they did not access published evidence to inform their practice and cited:

- Time constraints – not seen as a valued activity/poor organisational support
- Gaps- Capacity, funding, skills/training, and low confidence
- Lack of opportunities – barriers to getting research papers/search support/technology-based access

They were “interested to participate” however uptake of the face-to-face workshops was variable, citing childcare, management support and workload pressures as causes of failure to attend booked events.

There was no engagement from one third of local authorities throughout despite regional efforts of senior leaders. Occupational therapy leadership regional roles/inconsistencies in establishment, adding to challenges.

2.Opportunities

Those OTs that engaged with the project drew significant benefit, manifested in grant applications, abstracts submitted, clearer articulation of priorities for and a vision of the changes required, to improve use of research. It opened doors to those wanting to pursue careers in research. The project triggered a wide range of conversations that in turn spurred development of a new critical appraisal group initiative, an advisory group and inter-collaboration with social workers as a priority for wider adoption.

Implications: This project demonstrated serious challenges facing occupational therapists’ engagement with research. There were significant benefits in deploying the IMPACT model, deepening engagement with people who draw on care and support and unleashing OT talent and ambitions to collaborate with colleagues. Green-shoots of change were quickly evident, triggering tangible, scalable improvements for integrated prevention focused services of the future.

[1] Local Government Association. Occupational therapists in councils: unlocking capacity and driving change [Internet]. London: Local Government Association; 2022 [cited 2025 Oct 13]. Available from: <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/occupational-therapists-councils-unlocking-capacity-and-driving-change>