

Occupational therapy's dedication to human health and well-being: committed research, practice and learning

The occupational therapy profession is concerned with the person-centred enablement of engagement in everyday occupations to promote the human right to health and well-being (Hammell, 2017). A critical awareness of the political contexts of practice is increasingly evident in theory, research and education (Sakellariou and Pollard, 2017). As the profession continues to develop and advance its theoretical underpinnings through research, a confident, responsive and effective practice continues to evolve.

This person-centred approach informed by research, was for me, the overarching theme of the recent Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) Annual Conference and Exhibition held this year (2018) on the island of Ireland in Belfast City. RCOT extended a warm welcome to its colleagues in the Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland (AOTI). Unified through our shared passion for enablement through occupation, delegates and presenters alike enjoyed an energising conference that repeatedly engaged with the problematics of contemporary occupational therapy practice in health service delivery contexts that challenge the emancipatory vision of occupational justice.

From the Opening Plenary by Chris Pointon, co-founder of the *#hellomynameis* campaign with his late wife, Dr Kate Granger, reminding us of the importance of “the little things”, of really “seeing” the people we work with, to the Elizabeth Casson Memorial Lecture delivered by Dr Nick Pollard who envisages occupational therapy as a global community without borders working towards social transformation, to the very moving Closing Plenary by David McDonald, a campaigner for disabled people in society, speaking of the massive difference occupational therapists have made in his own life, the pivotal role of our profession was both visible and visionary. Importantly too, occupational therapy was challenged to continue to engage with issues connected to occupational justice as they are met in everyday practice. Again and again, the marginalisation of people living with illness, disability, homelessness, poverty and exclusion in its many forms was powerfully and passionately voiced by occupational therapists who shared work from both research and practice.

The diversity, creativity and power of modern occupational therapy practice in enabling the meaningful everyday were inspirational. Alongside stimulating traditional categories related to clinical practice, management, and practice education, it was refreshing to see themes such as feminism, culture, well-being and occupational justice presented as mainstream sessions. The “Occupation Stations” offered practical sessions where delegates could engage with the material. There were opportunities too for quieter reflection in the “zone out zone” where delegates could indulge in some wool craft or colouring. The individual woollen squares were taken away from RCOT 2018 and were transformed into a Knit for Peace blanket by Dr Clare Taylor – a fitting



gesture, I felt, of our collective time together. Other expressions of our citizenship of “the global city of occupational therapists” (Pollard, 2018, p. 492) included a “Twitter Wall” where people added their profile details and a “Pledge Tree” where delegates hung written promises inspired by the conference.

The particular richness that comes from a profession-centred conference was apparent to me throughout. Whilst all Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities are a valuable addition to our mandatory obligation to keep up to date, occupational therapy-specific CPD permits a breadth and, importantly, a depth of exchange that optimises the relevance of the information for occupation-centred practice. This is exemplified here in this current issue of the *Irish Journal of Occupational Therapy* which I am delighted to introduce.

The critical and political imperatives of client-centred occupational therapy practice are alive to us in a strong range of articles across diverse practice areas. The paper by Governey and Murphy on the survey of the current controversial Assessment of Need (AON), as perceived by paediatric occupational therapists practicing in Ireland, raises important ethical considerations. This is a particularly timely piece, as at the time of writing, our professional body, AOTI, voices members’ concerns about the proposed Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) (AOTI, 2018).

The ongoing tension between standardised assessment and functional observation within the person- and occupation-centred occupational therapy process is explored in the research by Sullivan, Lynch and Kirby. In their paper on whether visual perception testing of children correlates with caregiver and teacher reported functional impairment, they highlight the importance of engaging fully in clinical reasoning when appraising assessment rationale.

Also in the area of occupational assessment, the study by Stack, Duggan and Stapleton on fitness to drive assessment post-stroke reports on the current practice amongst a cohort of occupational therapists working with persons in post-stroke services in Ireland. The findings provide a good benchmark for current practitioners and also for research conducted on the topic into the future.

This issue of *IJOT* is fortunate to include an opinion piece on the role of occupational therapists working in Irish healthcare contexts in relation to the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015, thoughtfully written by Usher and Stapleton. It is a key piece of legislation to understand in the context of client-centred practice and occupational therapy’s advocacy role. The discourse on this topic at such an early stage post-ratification is very welcome.

I commend the authors on their commitment to those they work with, to their occupational therapy practice and to our profession in seeing these works through to publication and thank them for making their contributions visible and valuable to us all. I encourage others to do likewise, so that we can learn with and from each other as citizens of our worldwide community of occupational therapists.

Tina McGrath

*HSE Dublin North City Mental Health Services – Occupational Therapy,
Dublin, Ireland*

References

AOTI (2018), “AOTI statement on HSE assessment of need standard operating procedure”, available at: www.aoti.ie/attachments/35b01180-6c4e-4357-9f35-9d2f1618b7dd.PDF (accessed 3 September 2018).

- Hammell, K.W. (2017), "Opportunities for well-being: the right to occupational engagement", *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, Vol. 84 Nos 4/5, pp. 209-222, doi: [10.1177/0008417417734831](https://doi.org/10.1177/0008417417734831).
- Ikiugu, M.N. and Pollard, N. (2015), *Meaningful Living across the Lifespan: occupation-Based Intervention Strategies for Occupational Therapists and Occupational Scientists*, Whiting and Birch, London.
- Pollard, N. (2018), "The Dr Elizabeth Casson memorial lecture 2018: occupational stories from a global city", *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, Vol. 81 No. 9, pp. 487-494, doi: [10.1177/0308022618789583](https://doi.org/10.1177/0308022618789583).
- Sakellariou, D. and Pollard, N. (Eds), (2017), *Occupational Therapies without Borders: Integrating Justice with Practice*, 2nd ed., Elsevier, Edinburgh.