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Scoping study of occupational therapy research activity within Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales

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The College of Occupational Therapists, professional organisation for occupational therapy within the United Kingdom, undertook a scoping study of research and development activity in 3 of the United Kingdom nations (Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales). The objectives were to identify the stage of research development within each nation compared with an earlier study (Creek and Ilott 2002), and to establish recommendations for the further development of high quality research.

The study was designed as a two-stage project. The first stage involved a literature review to map the development of the infrastructure that shaped the research environment within each nation. Three focus groups were then held, involving researchers from academic and practice settings, to explore themes relating to barriers and opportunities for research activity, and plans for future progress. A student occupational therapist from each nation was involved with the project to assist with literature searching and data collection, providing an opportunity for student participation in a professional research activity.

Results showed that considerable development had taken place in the infrastructure to support occupational therapy research activity within a 6-year period, with recognized centres providing a focus for research, growing numbers of PhD students and increasing funding opportunities. However, substantive posts for postdoctoral researchers remain extremely limited. A workplace culture in which research activity is an integral part of professional life was found to be crucial to the application of evidence-based practice, and a lack of time for research-based activity was a barrier to progress. Finally, acknowledging the personal responsibility of engaging in research-related activity was linked to the uptake of relevant opportunities by occupational therapists.

Conclusions demonstrate that infrastructure, workplace culture and personal endeavour are all crucial in terms of making progress with the occupational therapy research agenda. Development in these three areas will contribute to research capacity development and an increase in research utilisation and evidence-based practice.

Reference:

Creek J & Ilott I (2002) Scoping study of occupational therapy research and development activity in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. Executive summary. London: College of Occupational Therapists