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Involving our service users in occupational therapy provision: how to set standards for involvement and evaluate our progress

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Service user involvement should be a high priority if we strive to deliver excellent occupational therapy services that meet the needs of individuals and communities. Occupational therapists need to be systematic and rigorous in finding out what their clients need, want and think of occupational therapy services. We strive to provide client-centred services, but how truly involved are our clients in their own service provision and in the evaluation and development of services? How can we embed service user involvement into our everyday practice? This takes commitment to working towards placing people who use our services at the centre of service planning, development and delivery as equal partners at every level. 'Involvement should not be seen as a one-off activity, but as a process that becomes part of the way staff work and organisations operate. As care should be based around the needs of the individual, so should the engagement process.' (Department of Health and Care Services Improvement Partnership, 2005, p. 10).

In addition, to ensuring service user involvement in occupational therapy service provision, occupational therapists can also support service user to contribute to wider service evaluation and development opportunities, such as responding to a consultation exercise or being a service user representative on a committee or working group.

Whilst working as a Modernisation Lead in a large mental health service in England, the presenter was responsible for evaluating service user involvement across in-patient and community services and developing a strategy for service user involvement. She developed standards for involvement of clients at individual, service and directorate wide levels. Evidence required to evaluate standards was identified and described. The presenter has also contributed to a Department of Health's Care Services Improvement Partnership project to develop 'Standards for the involvement of people with dementia.'

Examples of standards with linked evidence required for evaluation will be presented from both the mental health service user involvement strategy and the standards project for involving people with dementia.

Reference:

Department of Health and Care Services Improvement Partnership (2005) **Everybody's Business. Integrated mental health services for older adults: a service development guide.** London: Department of Health