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Contributing to Regional and National Policy: an occupational therapist's experience of policy development in England - a journey to improving services for older people with mental health problems.

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Introduction: When the presenter took on a service development role in an older people's mental health service she was frustrated by the lack of robust policy to support the occupational performance and participation needs of her clients. Determined to be a voice for people with dementia and functional mental illness, she sought opportunities to influence policy makers at regional and national levels.

Objectives: The presenter will share some positive experiences of contributing to policy development in order to encourage other occupational therapists to consider ways in which they might contribute to policy development in their own countries.

Description: The presenter will summarise her eight year journey into policy work and describe work related to: a national policy for older people with mental health problems; a Department of Health (DoH) commission to evaluate consultation data for three regions of England as part of the National Dementia Strategy development (DoH, 2009); commissions to undertake thematic and content analysis of regional data and make recommendations on priorities related to the needs of people with dementia; and a commission to evaluate and report on consultation data as part of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults policy update (DoH, 2008).

Discussion: Successful contribution in one project led to further opportunities for policy work. Involvement in policy development has been challenging, but ultimately it is a very interesting and rewarding experience.

Conclusion: Occupational therapists need to step out of their usual spheres of work and use opportunities like consultations, reviews, collaborative projects, special interest groups and networks to increase their profile amongst policy makers and create opportunities to contribute to the development, implementation and review of policy.

Contribution to the practice of occupational therapy: Occupational therapists have a valuable contribution to make to policy. We have a responsibility to raise awareness of the needs of our clients, in particular to increase understanding about the value of occupational engagement and lobby for effective services to enhance clients' occupational performance.

References:

DoH (2009) **Living well with dementia: A National Dementia Strategy**. London: DoH

DoH (2008) **Safeguarding adults: a consultation on the review of the No secrets guidance**. London: DoH