

Investigating the role for occupational therapy within clinical pathways of a Mother Baby Unit

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Introduction

Mother Baby Units (MBUs) support women's recovery from postnatal depression (PND) with the assistance of a multidisciplinary team which does not however, generally include occupational therapists. PND affects 13% of women worldwide, and can negatively impact the mother, her baby, and her partner. There is an apparent absence of literature regarding clinical pathways or the roles of allied health professionals within MBUs worldwide. Given the increasing documentation in occupational therapy literature focusing on mothering occupations, and the profession's long history of involvement in mental health and paediatrics, this profession has a strong theoretical and practice foundation to offer a valuable role within this setting. In order for this profession to be included in standard practice, identification and documentation of occupational therapy services within clinical pathways of MBUs is required.

Objective

To identify the potential role for occupational therapists in a MBU, and to outline the development of clinical pathways in which occupational therapy services are embedded.

Methods

A descriptive study was designed based on the National Health and Medical Research Council (1999) recommendations for the development of clinical practice guidelines. An extensive literature review was conducted about current interventions in MBUs and qualitative data was collected from key stakeholders (perinatal mental health providers, consumers and occupational therapists) through interviews and focus groups about service delivery, interventions and professional roles in a MBU. Data was content analysed and four categories were identified for occupational therapy services: self, transition, infant, and family. Expert panels contributed to the mapping of clinical pathways, against which the findings from occupational therapists were reviewed and embedded.

Results

This study has developed a pilot protocol of clinical pathways of psychosocial interventions for a MBU and has documented the potential role for occupational therapy within these clinical pathways.

Conclusion

A valuable and extensive role for occupational therapy in a MBU has been identified including providing interventions to both mother and baby, and in supporting parenting transition into the community.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy

There are now preliminary findings to build an evidence base for occupational therapists working within MBUs.