POSITION STATEMENT

Occupational Therapy Workforce Development

Statement of the position being taken

Occupational therapists promote participation in activities that people need, want or are required to do to advance health and wellbeing. Occupational therapists are therefore key human resources to address the health and occupational needs of populations worldwide.

To meet population needs within and across jurisdictions, the occupational therapy workforce must be of sufficient size, distribution and competency to fulfil professional role obligations. Substantial inequities in access to occupational therapy exist within and across countries of all income levels. Unmet need varies across service settings, sectors and geographic regions, including rural and remote communities[1,2]. These inequities are multifactorial and may reflect limited workforce supply, as well as structural barriers related to occupational therapy employment opportunities, remuneration, service funding, infrastructure, equipment, and workforce data systems[3].

Explicit workforce development policies, planning and research are required to reduce inequities in access to occupational therapy. They should be informed by reliable workforce data, identified population needs, service and participation outcomes and evidence of occupational therapy's social and economic return.

Statement of the significance of position or issue to occupational therapy

Occupational therapy workforce development is a strategic priority for the profession requiring collaboration among professional organisations, regulators, researchers, higher education institutions, employers, funders and policy makers. Action within and across jurisdictions is needed to strengthen local leadership and address education, workforce retention and wellbeing, continuing professional development, workforce leadership, equitable workforce distribution and ethical international recruitment.

To guide and coordinate action, WFOT developed the *Global Strategy for the Occupational Therapy Workforce*[3] that outlines directions and actions to improve access to occupational therapy. The Global Strategy provides a framework to integrate occupational therapy within broader health, education and social systems such as primary health care, rehabilitation, social welfare, disability and employment. It advances workforce development that is locally led; grounded in local cultures, languages, resources and health and social systems; and relies on collaborative workforce models that promote effective service delivery within the local context.

Statement of significance of position to the community and society

With ageing populations and the increasing prevalence of non-communicable health conditions, disability and mental health needs, demand for occupational therapy services continues to grow. Meeting population health needs and reducing the growing burden of chronic conditions and disability are global priorities of the World Health Organization (WHO)[4].

WHO recognises occupational therapy and other rehabilitation services as an integral component of universal health coverage and primary health care[4]. Integration of occupational therapy within national workforce and health system planning is therefore critical to strengthening access to services, supporting participation and inclusion, and improving health and wellbeing outcomes for individuals and communities.

Occupational therapy also contributes to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals through promoting health, wellbeing and participation in everyday life[5].

Summary and conclusion

WFOT affirms that occupational therapy workforce development is essential to improving equitable access to occupational therapy services worldwide. Guided by the *Global Strategy for the Occupational Therapy Workforce*, coordinated action is required to strengthen workforce capacity, reduce inequalities and meet the health and wellbeing needs of populations globally.

References

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4. World Health Organization. Rehabilitation. Geneva: WHO; 2024.
5. United Nations. Sustainable Development Goals. New York: United Nations; 2015.