



Occupational Therapy New Zealand Whakaora Ngangahau Aotearoa

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. This is a submission on behalf of Occupational Therapy New Zealand Whakaora Ngangahau Aotearoa. (OTNZ-WNA).

As Occupational Therapists / Kaiwhakaora Ngangahau we are strong advocates of equity, social and occupational justice. We strongly believe that the competencies of Occupational Therapists can be recognised as enablers in meeting the mental health needs of our community.

Occupational Therapy / Whakaora Ngangahau (OTNZ-WNA) is a holistic health profession who use the concept of occupation to mean all those things we do. Occupation is participation in meaningful activities that occupy our time, whether it is self-care, looking after others, education, leisure or work. OTNZ-WNA use occupation to improve well-being and quality of life for individuals and communities by engaging the concepts of what people can do, be, become and belong to. Occupational therapy is also known as a “doing” therapy.

OTNZ-WNA is an association that provides membership to registered Occupational Therapists and promotes the profession of occupational therapy. OTNZ-WNA is underpinned by a treaty relationship governance model that gives true effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Further information regarding this model can be found at our website at <https://www.otnz.co.nz/occupational-therapy/te-tiriti-treaty-relationship-governance-model/>

Question 1: What’s currently working well?

- Occupational therapists are a skilled workforce able to support wellness across all areas of a person’s life to address the complex and multi-faceted issues facing our communities
- Occupational therapists work within and collaboratively across many sectors including education, physical health, mental health, forensics, primary care and social agencies
- Occupational therapists work with people and whanau throughout their life journeys, from perinatal and infancy through to end of life care
- Occupational therapists continue to bring innovation, problem solving and leadership to healthcare

Question 2: What isn't working well at the moment?

We wish to focus the inquiry on the following imperatives:

- Occupational Therapists are a skilled and under-utilised workforce within the health system
- There is an over-emphasis on talking therapies at the cost of 'doing' therapies
- Persons with disability having additional mental health issues are not getting adequate support.
- There is an under-emphasis on functional outcomes and quality of life indicators

Occupational Therapists are a skilled and under-utilised workforce within the health system

Occupational therapists are being used to do generic health roles. Without having opportunity to work at the top of their scope and develop their skills, occupational therapists risk losing their professional identity, and the impact for service users is that the access to occupational therapy is significantly restricted.

There is an over-emphasis on talking therapies at the cost of 'doing' therapies

Whilst talking therapies are an evidence based and well used treatment in mental health, they are not suitable for all people. Much investment has been made in increasing access to talking therapies however waiting lists remain long.

Persons with disability having additional mental health issues are not getting adequate support.

For example, it is commonly assumed that anxiety is part and parcel of having a diagnosis of ASD (autism spectrum disorder). However the anxiety is often over and above that which one would expect for ASD. As per our knowledge over the recent months this includes students who are out of school because of their levels of anxiety and the resultant behaviour. It also includes students with suicide ideation or some cry for help suicide actions involving police and being brought in to the Emergency Department. The mental health (MH) assessment then comes back saying there is not a MH issue. At other times a child's wellbeing is worsening over time and early referrals to MH are declined only to be accepted when there is actual self-harm.

There is an under-emphasis on functional outcomes and quality of life indicators

Dominance from the medical model has created a culture within mental health services that focuses on treatment, monitoring and oversight within a key working model of care. Hence, we have a mental health service that focuses on symptom reduction with outcome measures reflecting this. There is limited focus on recovery, enablement, resilience and empowerment.

Question 3: What could be done better?

Occupational Therapists are a skilled and under-utilised workforce within the health system

Enable occupational therapists to work at the top of their scope and provide specific assessment, groups, interventions and recommendations to support service users to regain function and increase meaningful participation in their communities.

There is an over-emphasis on talking therapies at the cost of 'doing' therapies

Occupational therapists use a variety of evidence based approaches designed to achieve outcomes that focuses on providing people with meaningful occupation and therefore improving their lives. More focus needs to be placed on people being supported to regain function and participation. Occupational therapists have contributed much to wider mental health care services over recent years including sensory modulation and cognitive remediation therapy.

There is an under-emphasis on functional outcomes and quality of life indicators

What a person 'does' and their health and wellbeing are closely woven together. When a person's mental wellbeing is compromised, what they do, and how they go about their day starts to unravel. People measure their own health and wellbeing by what they can and can't do, our health service needs to focus on outcomes that are related to the persons' participation in occupations rather than symptoms they are experiencing. There are existing measures within occupational therapy.

Biculturalism and Treaty relationship

It is important to instil the treaty relationship model and bi-culturalism in mental health care models that respects Te Tiriti o Waitangi and that is practiced devoid of tokenism with remedies designed by Māori for Māori. New Zealand registered occupational therapists are competent and uniquely place to do so. Biculturalism is embedded in the competencies that occupational therapists achieve in maintaining their license to practice and is unequalled by any other health professional.

Question 4: From your point of view, what sort of society would be best for the mental health of all our people?

Rather than a system that reduces a person to a collection of symptoms and early warning signs, we would like to see a service that takes a holistic view of the person. A service that makes the connection between engagement in occupation (the things we need to do and want to do) and health and well-being. Occupational performance is defined as 'the ability to perceive, desire, recall, plan and carry out roles, routines, tasks and sub-tasks for self-maintenance, productivity, leisure and rest in response to demands of the internal and/or external environment". These measures capture what is meaningful to client and has a holistic approach. Occupational therapists can help in shifting focus from "what is the matter with" patients to "what matters" to them. This shift of focus is important to find sustainable solutions.

Question 5: Anything else you want to tell us

Occupational therapists have rehabilitation skills, and skills that transcend medical and social models of care that are essential for recovery. Occupational therapists focus on getting people back to doing what they want, need and must do, to get well and stay well. There are many professional services applying their trade that are not necessarily achieving an outcome that returns a citizen to making a contribution

to society by way of work and paying taxes. Occupational therapists offer broader solutions that is currently underutilised and that involves doing as opposed to talking, focuses on quality of life and delivers services taking into account cultural sensitivity.