

Position Statement
RECRUITING OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS FROM INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITIES
revised

Introduction

The World Federation of Occupational Therapists [WFOT] asserts that occupational therapy is an internationally recognised profession that contributes to the health and wellbeing of society.

Shortages in the global professional workforce have resulted in active recruitment from the low income countries to many of the high income countries. Over time, this has created dangerously low numbers of professionals remaining in the source country causing services to become minimal and in some instances non-existent. However, there have also been benefits to this recruitment approach, thus creating a difficult tension between those who seek to better their lives and those who require skilled employees.

This position statement aims to support responsible recruitment practices when actively sourcing occupational therapists from areas where the population of the profession is low in human resources.

WFOT Position

WFOT advocates that the international mobility of occupational therapists is essential to the evolution, growth and sustainability of both the profession and a population's wellbeing. WFOT supports the belief that occupational therapists have the right to apply for recognition and to practise their profession in another country. Occupational therapists who choose to exercise this right need to observe and meet the necessary registration and immigration criteria as prescribed by their host country¹.

A number of countries implement standards/legislation that govern the recruitment of occupational therapists from their country; these should be aimed at supporting the sustainability of the profession yet not infringe on an individual's right to apply for recognition in another country.

Countries, organisations, corporations and agencies that actively recruit occupational therapists from international locations need to consider the demographic profile of the source country, understand, interpret and make provision for the cultural differences that might exist between the sourcing country and the host country.

Occupational therapists choosing to practise their skills in another country need to observe, respect and benchmark their skills, beliefs and competencies against the requirements stated by their host country. Both occupational therapists and international recruiters need to consider the ethics of creating an adverse effect on the number of remaining therapists in countries where the profession is continuing to develop with limited human resources.

Rationale for the development of a position statement

Research shows that there is a demand for occupational therapists in countries that have both high and low numbers of qualified staff². Migration data also shows that some occupational therapists choose to practise their skills in countries different to those in which they were educated². In regions where the occupational therapy profession is continuing to develop, the migration of internationally educated therapists can offer invaluable support to the education, practice and research profiles that facilitate the profession's evolution³.

The majority of data relating to the migration of healthcare professionals focuses primarily on the nursing and medical professions and to a lesser extent on the migration of other healthcare workers^{4,5}. The reasons why healthcare professionals choose to migrate to another country are cited as including personal, social, economic, political, environmental and/or legal forces/factors^{5,6,7,8,9}.

A number of countries, organisations, corporations and agencies choose to recruit healthcare workers (including occupational therapists), from other international locations in order to sustain or develop capacity to address their populations' health and social care needs^{6,7,9,10,11}. Recruitment of healthcare workers from regions where the professional population is low has prompted a number of governments to implement ethical recruitment standards and policies aimed at protecting or governing the migration of their healthcare staff to other countries^{8,9,10,11,12,13}. Until recently, there has been little data about the demographic profile of the occupational therapy profession to inform these government standards and policies.

WFOT publishes research that illustrates the global profile of the profession and highlights the countries experiencing occupational therapy labour force shortages². This data should inform local policy and strategy development, particularly when considering the recruitment of occupational therapists from other countries.

Recognising that balance is needed between protecting the profession's growth in areas where its human resources are low and maintaining an individual's right to apply for recognition to practise their skills in another country, WFOT has formulated a statement to contribute to ethical and moral considerations when recruiting therapists from international locations.

Challenges for occupational therapists and their national associations:

- 1) Dissemination of the demographic profile of the occupational therapy profession that informs government policy to source internationally educated therapists from regions where human resources are not considered to be low.
- 2) Generate statistical information pertaining to the migration and immigration of occupational therapists to and from their country.
- 3) National associations should lobby and advocate for occupational therapists in their home country to have working conditions and continuing education opportunities that will support the retention of therapists in that country.
- 4) Evidence the unique contribution made by internationally educated occupational therapists to their health and social care system.
- 5) Respond to WFOT requests for demographic data that contribute to the global demographic profile of the profession within stipulated deadlines.

Challenges for WFOT

- 1) Maintain a comprehensive demographic profile of the occupational therapy profession.
- 2) Refine data collection methods to facilitate more effective responses from member associations.
- 3) Define ethical recruitment practice in relation to occupational therapy.

Conclusion

Occupational therapy is an internationally recognised profession that has a positive impact on the wellbeing of the population. Internationally educated therapists contribute to the service delivery of the profession in both developing and developed countries.

Occupational therapists have a right to apply for recognition to practise their skills in another country.

Occupational therapists who choose to work in another country should observe the registration, immigration and cultural requirements of their chosen destination.

Countries, organisations, corporations and agencies that choose to source occupational therapists from other international locations should consider the demographic profile of the sourcing country, recognise and make necessary provision for the cultural differences that may exist between the sourcing and host country.

WFOT advocates for and supports responsible recruitment practices particularly when sourcing occupational therapists from areas where the population of the profession does not meet the needs of the population in that country.

References

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