ADVANCING OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICE

EDITED BY ELIZABETH ANNE MCKAY, CHRISTINE CRAIK, KEE HEAN LIM AND GABRIELLE RICHARDS
Advancing Occupational Therapy in Mental Health Practice
Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of the late Hester Monteath, MBE, D.Ed, FCOT a pioneering occupational therapist whose vision, courage and determination benefited people with mental health problems. Furthermore, she inspired generations of occupational therapists to specialise in mental health practice – her spirit lives on.
Advancing Occupational Therapy in Mental Health Practice

Edited by

Elizabeth Anne McKay
Christine Craik
Kee Hean Lim
and
Gabrielle Richards
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contributors</th>
<th>vii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Part I: Introducing the Mental Health Context 1

1. What have we been ‘doing’?
   A historical review of occupational therapy 3
   **Elizabeth Anne McKay**

2. The changing face of occupational therapy in mental health 17
   **Gabrielle Richards**

3. Cultural sensitivity in context 30
   **Kee Hean Lim**

### Part II: Exploring Practice Contexts 49

4. Engaging the disengaged: Practising in acute in-patient settings 51
   **Samantha Dewis and Michelle Harrison**

5. Broadening horizons: Beyond acute mental health 63
   **Michelle Harrison and Samantha Dewis**

6. ‘Doing’ in secure settings 76
   **Elaine Hunter and Elizabeth Anne McKay**

7. Occupational, social and intrapersonal alienation explored in the community 89
   **Wendy Bryant**

8. Strengths and challenges to practice: Reconciling occupational justice issues as a prerequisite to mental health recovery 103
   **Karen L. Rebeiro Gruhl**

9. The art of occupation 118
   **Jacqueline Ede**
10 Vocational rehabilitation in the UK: How occupational therapy can contribute .......................... 132
Carla van Heerden

11 Powerful stories and challenging messages .................................................. 147
Graeme Smith

Part III: Research and Future Directions ....................................................... 159

12 Reviewing consumer-run mental health services ................................. 161
Samson Tse and Carolyn Doughty

13 Twists and turns: The development of a clinical–academic career pathway .............................................................. 189
Edward A. S. Duncan

14 Researching within mental health: Slow and steady – a Canadian tour ............... 204
Thelma Sumsion

15 Future prospects for occupational therapy in mental health .................. 215
Christine Craik

Index ....................................................... 227
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Preface

Advancing practice in complex environs: mental health

Progress lies not in enhancing what is but in advancing towards what will be   (Kahlil Gibran)

Occupational therapy evolved as a health and social care profession from the roots of psychiatry. Occupational therapists have worked with people with mental illness for over a century. It is accepted that psychiatry has changed and has been redefined since that time and that the emphasis for intervention has moved beyond the asylum of old to the multi-cultural community of today. Occupational therapy’s contribution to mental health services internationally is significant, if under-recognised. That said, recent research from around the world demonstrates the importance of meaningful occupation to improve clients’ health, their functioning and participation in their local neighbourhood.

The editors represent both practice and education, and all believe that occupational therapy has made, and should continue to make, that significant contribution to mental health practice. The editors include British, Australian and Singaporean therapists; the idea for this book grew from the belief that mental health continues to be a practice area within ever-changing contexts and dynamics and with particular challenges, and that expert narratives, whether from practitioners or researchers, are not well represented in the professional literature. Their stories of delivering or researching services in complex systems can offer real-world perspectives and useful insights to others.

Whiteford and Wright-St Clair (2005) highlight that complexity both challenges and explains our modern society, existing as it does at many levels. They define complexity as ‘the richness and variety of structure and behaviour that arises from the interactions between the components of a system’ (p. 5). It is the array of interactions and interconnections that make the health care and social systems in which we work complex environs. Rarely are occupational therapists required to find a simple solution to a client’s problem – most often clients’ problems are situated in contexts that demand intricate responses from practitioners.

Cowan (2006) discusses complexity in relation to higher education; here his perspective is related to occupational therapy. If we consider therapy as an outcome of an interaction between individuals and environments, and if we further consider that both therapist and client are interactions of their history, culture, thinking and emotions, then it follows that the result will be unpredictable, with interventions having unexpected outcomes. Given this, nothing in practice is
certain and there is no correct answer; then, therapists must act well, in light of their understanding, experiences and research. This is advanced practice in action.

Professional practice knowledge refers to the knowledge base used by an individual or a profession including knowledge derived from theory, research and professional experience. Advanced practitioners develop practice wisdom. That is to say, practice wisdom generated from their practice experience, cognitive and metacognitive processes are linked in clinical reasoning, with professional judgements and the affective processes that together produce cultural competence (Higgs & Jones, 2000). These aspects form the basis of applying advanced professional knowledge in practice. To summarise, to become advanced practitioners, therapists must move beyond competent practice. They are required to be reflective, curious and creative: developing expertness in their own specific domain as well as being able to conduct and contribute to research and to educate others.

The need for advanced practitioners to deal with the ever-changing, complex, health and social care contexts worldwide is gaining in recognition. Fraser and Greenhaugh suggested that ‘successful health services in the 21st century must aim not merely for change, improvement and response but for change-ability, improvability and responsiveness’ (2001, p. 799). Advanced practitioners are seen as crucial elements to develop the health workforce and to modernise services. Esdaile and Ryan (2003). outlined key elements of advanced practice. These included; breadth and depth of individual knowledge, appreciation of the wider context, critical thinking, continual striving to further develop knowledge and skills, often leading to additional qualifications and a commitment to quality. Typically such individuals also make a contribution to one or more areas of practice. (p. 32)

The advanced practitioner is defined as being specialised or having highly developed knowledge and skills beyond those, which are required for registration, encompassing the breadth and depth of current and future professional practice (DOH, 2000).

This book captures and reflects current advanced occupational therapy practice, nationally and internationally. It showcases the innovative practice and research taking place in occupational therapy within mental health contexts. Throughout the text there is an emphasis on occupational therapists being specialists in occupation and for them to be specialists rather than generalists in the mental health arena. The authors articulate their expert knowledge and skills in their practice or research.

Finally, we hope that you are stimulated by the text that it speaks to you on many levels allowing you to reflect on your own practice and to consider how you can contribute to advancing occupational therapy in mental health in the future.

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References


Part I  Introducing the Mental Health Context