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#400WORDS: KNOWLEDGE + ACTION

Towards a uniform approach to occupational therapy initial assessments across acute mental health wards: a service-based improvement project proposal

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Background

Occupational therapists within in-patient mental health settings have a significant role in recovery and improving patient outcomes. Timely occupational therapy (OT) interventions can improve patient wellbeing, facilitate early discharge, help people achieve personalised goals, and aid social inclusion (RCOT, 2017). Efficiency and standardisation in completing and recording OT contacts including the initial assessment within mental health settings is important for a high-quality service to meet standards of care. There are a variety of policies and guidelines that set out standards of care, for example, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines for inpatient mental health services states: '*start discharge planning at admission or as early as possible when in crisis*' (NICE, 2022, pp39). The approach taken to complete the initial OT assessment is currently not standardised for patients admitted to mental health wards across Somerset.

Aim

The aim of this service-based improvement project is to develop and implement a standardised protocol for completing OT initial assessments to capture in-patient OT needs.

Methods

Setting and Population

Acute mental health wards with OT services in Somerset NHS Foundation Trust will be included. The population will be patients admitted to the ward with an anticipated length-of-stay of more than three weeks.

Development and evaluating an initial OT assessment protocol

This project will adopt a mixed-method approach, including:

1. Identify components that should be included in the initial assessment (literature review).
2. Consensus of components of the initial assessment (focus group with OTs).
3. Evaluate OT initial assessments in seven acute mental health wards. Per ward, three patient records will be assessed using the standardised data collection form developed in stage 1-3.
4. Co-produce an initial assessment protocol for patients admitted to mental health wards (focus group with stakeholders).
5. Implement and evaluate the initial assessment protocol.

Discussion and impact

The objectives of the NHS Framework for Personalisation of Care (NHS England, n.d.) align with occupational therapy practice. This service-based improvement project aims to support OTs to promote personalisation of care within their clinical practice. This project will support the integration of occupational therapy theory in practice. It will also help guidelines and meet clinical expectations to improve the consistency of the OT service provided to patients accessing acute mental health wards. This project may also support isolated OTs to feel part of a unified team, nurturing job satisfaction and possibly aiding staff retention.

References

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