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AOTI

Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland

Research Strategy

2014 - 2019

Introduction & Background

The Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland (AOTI) is the professional body for occupational therapists in Ireland. As a professional body, AOTI recognises the importance of ensuring evidence-based best practice, effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of Occupational Therapy services to the benefit of service users. In 2007 a research committee was established within AOTI to guide a research agenda for the profession. In 2008, The Therapy Project Office developed core competencies for the occupational therapy profession (Therapy Project Office, 2008). These had a research and evidence-based focus (see appendix A).

Context of the Irish Health services and research:
Since 2006, the Health Research Board (HRB) and Health Services Executive (HSE) have prioritised a research agenda which resulted in the establishment of some key policy, strategy and funding programmes. The most significant of these was the first Irish Research Strategy for Therapy Professions (DoHC, 2008). This strategy identifies five core strategic goals to develop therapy research in Ireland:

1. Develop excellent research capacity and resources in the Therapy Professions to undertake high quality research.
2. Promote good research governance to ensure all therapy research is conducted to high scientific and ethical standards.
3. Ensure clear direction for research activities through agreed therapy research priorities.
4. Support and build on an evidence-based culture.
5. Ensure effective dissemination of research findings (DoHC, 2008, p8-14).

This research strategy was followed by the publication of a specific research plan which aimed to ensure that the gap between research and health outcomes was addressed through driving research development in a coherent way (HRB, 2010). The plan identified the need to focus on generating knowledge and supporting its application in policy and practice, in the context of a coherent health research programme supported by the development of high-quality health information systems. The overall goal in this strategic plan is the task of ‘bringing research and development to life’ (HRB, 2010, p3). Both strategy documents form the foundations of the current Irish health research agenda and underpin the development of the AOTI research agenda 2013.

To date, the AOTI Research Committee has been promoting research practices among the AOTI membership, and the occupational therapy body in Ireland, with a specific goal of facilitating a research ethos among members as a priority (AOTI, 2010). Examples of successful completed initiatives include:

- research workshops conducted at the annual AOTI conference
- the development of funding applications to the HSE in collaboration with the AOTI CPD officer to provide research relevant workshops for therapists across the country in 2011 and 2012
- the development of the research section on the AOTI website to serve as a site for dissemination of research and sharing of resources for members

As part of the next phase of development in research, we are now at a stage of targeting more specifically goal 3 above: to ensure a clear direction for research through the development of a Research Strategy for Occupational Therapy in Ireland. In order to support this process a number of activities have been completed including:

- In 2009, AOTI took part in the national Delphi study to identify research priorities for the profession. In 2010, the results of this study were presented at the annual AOTI conference keynote address.
- In 2011, the process of reviewing international research strategy documents was initiated (see appendix B).
- In 2012, a focused meeting was held at the AOTI conference to begin dialogue about how to drive strategy development based on need.[1]

[1] See appendix C and D for an overview of the Therapy Strategy and Delphi study.

Why a Research Strategy?

Research strategies aim to ensure practice develops in line with current best evidence and, that therapists engage in evidence-informed practice. This ensures that occupational therapy services are both cost effective and meet the needs of clients. They also support practitioners to actively engage in the production of research and not just be consumers of it. Similar strategies have been developed in other countries (e.g. UK, 1997, 2007; USA, 2011; Australia, 2010). In each case, national research strategies in healthcare, and other research-related documents, are used to contribute to a comprehensive, inclusive strategy that reflects the specific professional needs of occupational therapy in the relevant countries. So, an Irish occupational therapy research strategy needs take into account key strategies, policy documents and prioritised areas of specific practice as well as the Delphi study findings.

The changing healthcare context in Ireland in recent years has also necessitated the development of an AOTI research strategy. National Clinical Programmes have been established to improve and standardise patient care throughout the Health Service Executive. The programmes have been developed to address the three objectives of improved quality of care for all HSE service users, improved access to all services, and improvements in cost effectiveness. These three objectives will only be met through active research by the therapy professions. More detail on the programmes can be accessed at http://www.healthireland.ie/eng/about/Who/clinical/natclinprog/listofprogrammes.html)

In addition, the HSE has established a Health and Social Care Professions (HSCP) Research Committee to progress the research agenda in healthcare. To date this group have produced a review of research activity and identified skills and training needs of HSCP staff (McHugh & Byrne, 2011). As a profession, occupational therapists need to actively work with the HSCP to have a say in how research can be supported, and having a research strategy will ensure that the needs of the profession is represented. Therefore, the purpose of developing an AOTI research strategy is to guide research practice within the profession so that it is congruent with national needs and international healthcare trends while also meeting the needs of the profession in Ireland. This strategy will cover the period 2014-2019.

Vision for research in occupational therapy:

Occupational therapists in Ireland will value research and will create and integrate research evidence into practice, education, management and policy, to enable the provision of high quality, occupation-focused, person-centred occupational therapy services, underpinned by research evidence.

This research strategy is based on six guiding principles:

1. Taking the Irish context into account; including demographic needs, identified public needs, identified professional needs, feasibility, resources and cost-effectiveness
2. Valuing a breadth of research perspectives
3. Being relevant to all AOTI members
4. Taking the wide range of occupational therapy practice areas into account
5. Aiming to support the service users' voice in the research process
6. Being informed by and acting in conjunction with national research-related agendas and AOTI strategic developments

Categories of research:

Cognisant of international trends and also Irish contextual concerns (see appendix E), the research strategy aims to support research in the following categories:

- Basic research[2] – primary research which investigates the link between occupation, environment, health and wellbeing
- Translational research- research that is primarily concerned with the application of basic research findings in therapy practice.
- Research on the service user perspective, and the lived experience of disability or occupation
- Research supporting the development of assessment/measurement tools
- Research which evaluates the effectiveness of occupational therapy practice
- Health services/systems research – research investigating organisations, policies and emerging areas of practice
- Secondary research – systematic reviews, meta-analyses and meta-syntheses; including secondary use of data from national data-sets such as Growing Up Ireland longitudinal study (GUI), The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA).
- Research directed at supporting and improving clinical education and academic practice

[2] Note: basic research is also known as fundamental research and refers to researching foundational aspects to underpin or guide applied research, e.g. older peoples time use (basic research) can guide service development for intervention programmes for elders (applied research)

Overall Aim

The overall aim of the research strategy is to provide a strategic direction for occupational therapy research in Ireland. This will guide AOTI members to employ best-practices, to provide cost-effective services, to support and develop research in practice and to disseminate outcomes in order to maximise the occupation, health and wellbeing of people we serve in Ireland.

Goals of the AOTI Research Strategy (2014-2019)

1. To develop the research capacity of AOTI members and support them in becoming research active and in generating research in the occupational therapy community in Ireland.
2. To support and build on an evidence-based culture among occupational therapists in Ireland and encourage an ethos that values research.
3. To develop resources and infrastructure around research in Ireland and to work towards building a body of evidence to support occupational therapy practice and education in an Irish context.
4. To promote research governance and ethical standards in occupational therapy research.
5. To promote effective dissemination and critical use of research findings.
6. To encourage research that is responsive to the needs of service users, national and international priorities and healthcare agendas.

Action Plan for Achieving Goals

GOAL 1	OBJECTIVE	ACTION
To encourage research that is responsive to the needs of service users, national and international priorities and healthcare agendas.	a. To support research which seeks to strengthen the occupational therapy evidence-base, especially in the Clinical Care Pathways key areas.	To provide research education workshops on new research priorities and dissemination of new research evidence at conference or through CPD events. To work with Advisory Groups to establish priorities for research within each specialist area of practice, based on service needs.
	b. To encourage active service user involvement in research.	To encourage research links with voluntary groups/ services user groups. To ensure research education includes provision of training on methods that are effective in service-user, participant involvement.
	c. To encourage occupational therapists to remain up-to-date with current research priorities within Ireland so they can ensure research seeks to address these identified needs.	To disseminate information relating to healthcare agendas, funding opportunities and national healthcare programmes and to provide information on how to achieve this. To encourage AOTI members to be cognisant of national priorities for research when decisions are being made in relation to what research to on undertake.

GOAL 2	OBJECTIVE	ACTION
To develop the research capacity of AOTI members & support them in becoming research active & generating research in the occupational therapy community in Ireland.	a. To promote and develop postgraduate research.	To lobby for, organise, promote & provide research workshops for AOTI members. To identify & provide information on professionally relevant postgraduate programmes.

GOAL 2	OBJECTIVE	ACTION
continued.	b. To encourage and support the establishment of research hubs and research partnerships.	To work collaboratively & establish research partnerships between academic institutions and clinicians. To support multi-site research, in order to reduce duplication, improve research quality, and share skills.
	c. To improve research skills among occupational therapists in Ireland.	To apply for continuing funding to support research training workshops for occupational therapists. To run workshops on research skills at the AOTI conference and at other times where appropriate. To provide documents functioning as research resources and supports on the AOTI website and increase members' awareness of same. To ensure occupational therapists are confident in using occupational therapy specific and inter-professional databases by supporting training in database searching.
	d. To work with the AOTI advisory groups to build up programmes of occupational therapy research and to identify their research needs.	To ensure practitioners have access to research skill supports as required. To promote practitioners' awareness of the significance of undertaking research which fits the national programmes and need for increased evidence to justify our occupational therapy interventions by making explicit connections between programmes and practitioners' research needs.
	e. To foster collaborations in research across disciplines & internationally.	To contribute to the research subgroup of the Health and Social Care Professional Education and Development Advisory Group of the HSE, make AOTI members aware of this subgroup's activities as well as any opportunities for interdisciplinary research.
	f. To continue to up-skill therapists in maintaining and developing further critical appraisal and research skills and applying findings to practice.	Provide access to EBP and research skills workshops in collaboration with the AOTI CPD officers.

GOAL 3	OBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVE
To support and build on an evidence-based culture among occupational therapists in Ireland and encourage an ethos that values research.	a. To promote an awareness of members' research responsibilities under the AOTI code of ethics and the AOTI competencies document in relation to evidence-based practice & research.	To prepare a position paper on research that could be used by practitioners to negotiate allocated/protected time for research /EBP pursuits. To provide tangible strategies to managers and therapists to support research activity within their departments. To support members who are currently research active via access to resources & mentoring.
	b. To support members who are research proficient in mentoring others.	To develop guidelines around mentoring in clinical research. To establish a list of potential mentors & their area of interest. To build up links within academic institutes and clear pathways for clinicians to access support.
	c. To promote awareness of the benefits of a research culture and the undertaking of EBP throughout the profession.	To continue to have a strong presence for research in the regular AOTI newsletter and website. To have research themed workshops/ presentations/ seminars/ poster displays at conference. To encourage recognition of quality research through development of an AOTI national award scheme for completed projects.
	d. To support occupational therapy managers to build on a workplace culture that values research.	Provide journal clubs formats on website. To advocate for clinical specialist posts with a clear remit for research. To ensure that clinical specialists have protected time for research. To encourage use of outcome measures to support managers in advocating for clinical interventions, programmes, etc. To promote the sharing of knowledge and skills between those more research-experienced to those more novice in the field via interactive forms at local work-site and at advisory group/ regional level.

GOAL 4	OBJECTIVE	ACTION
To develop research resources and infrastructure in Ireland and to work towards building evidence to support occupational therapy practice and education in an Irish context.	a. To investigate and promote research funding for occupational therapists in Ireland.	To source therapy research funding accessible to occupational therapists in Ireland. To develop new avenues of therapy research funding, including the development of AOTI research grant schemes. To promote the ring-fencing of funding for research purposes. To make AOTI members aware of funding sources available to them. To liaise with inter-professional bodies to improve access to research funding by therapy professionals.
	b. To collate synopses of completed occupational therapy related research projects.	To encourage occupational therapy students to submit synopses of their completed research projects to the AOTI website. To promote the use of this facility (to submit research synopses) among the AOTI membership.

GOAL 5	OBJECTIVE	ACTION
To promote research governance and ethical standards in occupational therapy research.	a. To act as a gatekeeper for the occupational therapy research carried out through AOTI.	To promote awareness of the purpose, pathways to attainment and benefit of ethical approval for research among practitioners. To ensure all research synopses published on the AOTI website have full ethical approval. To ensure that all research projects accessing the AOTI membership database have full ethical approval. To work with the AOTI conference organising committee to ensure adherence to ethical standards among all research presented at the AOTI national conference.

GOAL 5	OBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVE
continued.	b. To develop guidelines for occupational therapy research governance in Ireland.	To enter dialogue with the HSCP subgroup regarding the standardisation of Ethics Committee procedures for Health and Social Care Professionals. To identify relevant ethical governance in each area and produce a centralized database of same. To prepare a position paper on ethical standards in research and recommend adherence.

GOAL 6	OBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVE
To promote effective dissemination and critical use of research findings.	a. To identify national and international opportunities for members to present & disseminate their research findings.	To promote awareness of pathways to publication at journal and conference level (nationally and internationally).
	b. To support members in accessing & disseminating information using AOTI resources such as the Irish Journal of Occupational Therapy and AOTI conference; advisory group study days.	To provide specific resources on the research section of the AOTI website around research dissemination. To continue to support the Irish Journal of Occupational Therapy and the AOTI National Conference.
	c. To provide workshops on research dissemination skills e.g. writing for publication, presentation skills, etc.	To develop, promote and organise workshops supporting the development of specific research skills.

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APPENDIX A

Therapy Project Office: Occupational Therapy Competencies 2008:
This critical document was developed through the Therapy Project Office with the aim of developing a framework to guide professional development, to assist in career progression and to identify learning and development needs (Clyne, McCoubrey & Hamilton, 2008). In this framework, competence is defined as 'the behavioural definition of the knowledge, skills, values and personal qualities that underlie the adequate performance of professional activities' (Bossers, Miller, Polatajko & Hartley, 2002, p. 11). Within this document, specific graduate, entry-level competencies related to Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) and research are identified- that on graduation, therapists will be able to:

- Demonstrate and apply contemporary evidence based practice principles to OT
- Integrate EBP principles into OT to ensure quality standards of practice
- Source, analyse and critique literature and research findings relating to practice
- Understand principles and methodology of research applicable to OT practice
- Apply research skills as applicable to OT practice

Furthermore, at a senior level, the document states that the therapist is able to:

- Engage in and /or collaborate in research to inform EBP
- Collaborate with all relevant stakeholders in respect of research issues (ethics, funding etc.)
- Disseminate research
- Participate in interdisciplinary research

And at a clinical specialist level:

- Demonstrate advanced knowledge of EBP
- Critique and evaluate current EBP in specialist area
- Identify potential for future development of EBP
- Play a pivotal role in integration of research evidence into practice
- Acquire and develop research skills applicable to practice
- Participate in collaborative interdisciplinary research
- Use research outcome in planning and providing future services

Consequently, we can see from this document that research is now considered a central element in practice. As a professional body, we need now to ensure that these aspirations are supported in practice through AOTI and the research programme of development.

APPENDIX B

Review of papers from other countries:
In 2011 a review of documents from other countries was commenced and a discussion paper produced (Brown, 2011) for the Research committee. In this paper, Brown outlined key objectives that can be applied to our Irish context in relation to different levels: from practitioners, to managers, academics to research committees and specialist groups, and from AOTI to the national and employing agencies. This mirrored the objectives formulated by the COT in 2007, which applied objectives at each of these levels to ensure clear roles and pathways were identified to support a 5-year plan. This review of international papers highlighted other important information in relation to the process of developing a research strategy. Key information with regard to international practice in developing research strategy in the occupational therapy profession is listed below.

Australia:
The Australian working group for research established occupational therapy priorities in the country through critically reviewing international research priorities for Occupational Therapy, critically reviewing previous work done by the Occupational Therapy body in Australia, exploring previous research into research needs and priorities in Australia, considering the strategic goals of the profession of Occupational Therapy in Australia and identifying current gaps and opportunities in research award, training and support.

USA:
Research agenda includes 6 research categories of concern: assessment/ measurement, intervention, translational, basic, health services, research training. In the centennial vision also, some research priorities are identified: provide evidence for efficacy of clinical practice, test reliability and validity of assessment tools, examine link between occupation and health and wellness, basic research on how disability affects social participation and community engagement, and explore topical questions/current issues.

UK:
Developed a research strategy 1997 and highlighted importance of research for the profession, including that of being research consumers, participants and proactivity in relation to professional development. Strategy evolved in line with national changes in healthcare and included a prioritisation project similar to the Irish Delphi study. Their review and development of research agenda also included the involvement of special interest group to ensure the National Research strategy for OT could then be applied specifically to the specialist sections also.

APPENDIX C

National Health Strategy: Therapy Research

In 2008, the first research strategy for the therapy professions in Ireland was published: 'Therapy Research- Delivering Best Health; a research strategy for the therapy professions in Ireland 2008-2013' (2008). The strategy argued for all therapists to be consumers of research, while some should participate and lead research. This was viewed as essential, with the acknowledgement that in order to achieve this, therapists need to be supported to do so (DoHC, 2008). Of top priority in the National Therapy Research strategy was the need for therapy research to be aligned with overall national priorities for health care research (DoHC, 2008, p. vii). Furthermore, it was acknowledged that such priorities must be aligned with those of other sectors such as education and enterprise. This has significance for the occupational therapy profession as therapists frequently work in varied sectors of society and not just in health.

Mission statement

To create a therapy research system which supports therapists to add to, and use, the knowledge base, ensuring evidence based best practice, effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of health and social care services.

The outcomes envisaged from implementation of the research strategy are:

1. 'That health and social care policy is based on reliable evidence of needs and the most effective means of meeting those needs
2. The most effective interventions are developed and implemented across the continuum of health and social care, thus benefiting service users and the public at large
3. Information is available to those responsible for the delivery of health and social carer services on those interventions that are effective and those that are not as well as ways to improve quality, effectiveness, access and efficiency in healthcare.'

Principles of the strategy:

- 'Focus on research activity that engages all stakeholders and reflects their needs
- Research is of high quality and informs health care practice and national health care policy
- Includes three elements of knowledge generation, dissemination and use
- Is based on collaborative partnerships among all stakeholders, including Department of Health and Children, the Health service Executive, the Health Research Board, Professional bodies, higher education institutions and other interested parties
- Is aligned with the wider research agenda of the health sector and the HSE'

Goals/Objectives of the health research strategy:

1. 'Develop excellent research capacity and resources in the Therapy Professions to undertake High quality research
2. Promote good research governance to ensure all therapy research is conducted to high scientific and ethical standards
3. Ensure clear direction for research activities through agreed therapy research priorities
4. Support and build on an evidence-based culture
5. Ensure effective dissemination of research findings'

(DoHC, 2008, p. 8-14).

APPENDIX D

The Identification of Research Priorities for Therapy Professions in Ireland (2010):
As an outcome of the National health Strategy, funding was provided to carry out a Delphi study to explore and identify priorities for therapy research. This was to address the third goal of the Therapy strategy as outlined above. Thirty-nine occupational therapist's engaged in this process (14 academics and 25 practitioners) resulting in the identification of a top ten list of research priorities. The top three for example were:

1. To develop tools and measures to test for changes in occupational performance as a result of occupational therapy intervention
2. To evaluate the quantitative evidence for effectiveness for a variety of occupation-based OT interventions
3. To identify ways in which Occupational Therapy interventions support elders stay at home longer

These examples demonstrate the occupational therapists' emphasis on assessment research (where instruments are developed to support measurement of change and outcomes) and on intervention research (outcomes and effectiveness). However, it is acknowledged that priorities are based on a low-level of representation from the Occupational Therapy profession and need to be considered in this context.

APPENDIX E

Identification of Occupational Therapy research categories:

On reviewing existing Irish documents and structures, it is clear that research can be categorised into a number of different areas. For example, the Health Research Board and the Therapy Priorities (Delphi) study both identify areas of research (see table 1).

Table 1: Outline of research categories identified in both the Irish Health Research Board and the Therapy Priorities study

Action Plan for Research 2009[3]	Delphi study 2010[4]
1. Clinical Research – research on patients	1. Practice evaluation
2. Health Services /systems research – practice and policy level	2. Health promotion
3. Translational Research – concerned with application of basic research findings into innovative strategies etc. for diagnosis, treatment or prevention of human disease	3. Service organisation
4. Population Health – goal to improve health of population/sub-groups	4. Clinical academic training
5. Biomedical Research – basic research at cellular, organ/body level	5. Service user perspective
	6. Cost-effectiveness of services
	7. Epidemiology

[3] Department of Health and Children (2009). Action plan for research 2009-13. Dublin: DoHC.

[4] The Identification of Research Priorities for the Therapy Professions in Ireland Summary Report (July 2010).

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