

SOUTH WESTERN AREA HEALTH BOARD

Report No. 12/2002

Board Meeting – 3rd September 2002

Community Occupational Therapy Services

The Report of the Expert Group on Various Health Professions (April 2000) describes the role of the Occupational Therapist as follows:-

“The purpose of occupational therapy is to maximise the “fit” between what an individual wants and needs to do and his/her ability to achieve this.

Occupational therapists have an intricate knowledge and understanding of the physical sciences, including anatomy, physiology and kinesiology, as well as the human sciences of psychology and sociology. All these essential elements combine to provide an occupational therapist with a unique understanding of occupational performance.”

The staffing complement and vacancy levels within occupational therapy in the four community care areas are as follows:-

Occupational Therapist Manager

Community Services Area	Complement	Vacancies
Dublin South City (CCA 3)	1	1
Dublin South West (CCA 4)	1	-
Dublin West (CCA 5)	1	-
Kildare/West Wicklow (CCA 9)	1	.5
Total	4	1.5

Senior Occupational Therapist

Community Services Area	Complement	Vacancies
Dublin South City (CCA 3)	10.5	5
Dublin South West (CCA 4)	9.5	4.5
Dublin West (CCA 5)	7	6
Kildare/West Wicklow (CCA 9)	11	4.2
Total	38	19.7

Basic Grade Occupational Therapist

Community Services Area	Complement	Vacancies
Dublin South City (CCA 3)	2	2
Dublin South West (CCA 4)		
Dublin West (CCA 5)		
Kildare/West Wicklow (CCA 9)	1	-
Total	3	2

Currently, just over 50% of the occupational therapy posts within the South Western Area Health Board are vacant. There is a national shortage of therapy grades, including occupational therapists.

Last year, the Department of Health & Children commissioned Peter Bacon and Associates (Economic Consultants) to review the provision of therapy services and his report "Current and Future Supply & Demand Conditions in the Labour Market for Certain Professional Therapists" issued in March 2001.

The report concluded: -

- (i) **that a situation of excess demand exists in the labour market for qualified personnel in the Therapy Healthcare Sector.**
- (ii) **the education and training system as it currently operates, does not deliver an adequate supply of qualified personnel.**

Although it is not possible to be absolutely precise about the numbers required in the future, the Bacon report concluded that approximately 875 additional occupational therapists would be required up to 2015.

Up to this year there has been just one approved third-level training course for occupational therapists in Ireland, with 35 graduates each year. From October 2002 there will be 75 additional training places for occupational therapy, 25 each in U.C.C., NUI Galway and University of Limerick. The training course is 4 years duration. The South Western Area Health Board is currently sponsoring four occupational therapist in training. In addition, a recruitment agency with experience in the area of therapy grades has been engaged by all the health boards and is currently recruiting occupational therapists from abroad.

As a result of these vacancies, there are waiting lists for the services of community occupational therapists. Cases are prioritised on the basis of need. Currently there are three priority groupings – Priority 1 status deals with referrals where the person is terminally ill, breakdown or failure of essential equipment and pressure relief. These are assessed within 7 – 10 days. Priority 2 status includes progressive neurological conditions, pressure prevention, clients/carers experiencing severe difficulties/at risk, or presenting with complex functional and social problems. Priority 3 status covers other referrals. The information provided at the time of referral is key in determining priority. Referrals are re-prioritised on the basis of changing circumstances/additional information.

Applications for disabled person’s grants (DPG), a scheme operated by the local authorities which assists applicants provide additional accommodation or to carry out works of adaptation, are referred to the occupational therapy service/Senior Area Medical Officer for assessment and professional advice. These referrals are prioritised on the same basis as other referrals.

There has been a noticeable increase in the number of applications for DPG submitted to Kildare/West Wicklow Community Occupational Services since 2000: -

Year 2000	193 applications
Year 2001	226 applications
Year 2002	370 (estimate)

Currently, 127 DPG applications are awaiting assessment in Community Services Kildare/West Wicklow. This increase in applications has occurred at the same time as the health board is experiencing difficulties in the recruitment of occupational therapists due to the overall national shortage.

There have been ongoing discussions between Community Services Kildare/West Wicklow and Kildare County Council on this matter. At a meeting between Kildare County Council and Community Services Kildare/West personnel held on 28th May, 2002, it was agreed that Kildare County Council would investigate direct provision of occupational therapy services by contract/consultancy.

Mr. Kevin Ward, General Manager, and Bríd Clarke, Assistant Chief Executive, met with Mr. Niall Bradley, County Manager, on 15th August, 2002. It has been agreed that a new information leaflet and application form will be drawn up by Kildare Co. Council in consultation with the South Western Area Health Board. It was

acknowledged that applicants require more information about the assessment process and also that the current application form does not ensure that all relevant information is provided. This will assist the occupational therapy service in prioritising cases. Kildare Co. Council will also be informed by the South Western Area Health Board of the outcome of the prioritisation status, which will assist the Council in responding to applicants. Kildare Co. Council is also examining the possibility of advertising for an occupational therapist on a contractual basis. Wexford Co. Council advertised for such a person in July and other local authorities have done so previously, including Dublin City Council.

The Board will continue to work closely with Kildare County Council on this matter and a further meeting is scheduled for 3rd September, 2002, between the Occupational Therapy Managers and council officials.

A further report on this matter including the situation in relation to the other local authorities will be presented to a future Standing Committee meeting.

Pat Donnelly
Chief Executive Officer