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Occupational Therapy within Adult Social Care Services

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Macro, meso and micro contexts of elders in the UK

Occupational therapists help older adults maintain functional ability and independence by facilitating access to supportive environments, assistive technologies, and community resources. They also work to shape inclusive policies, promote accessible housing and public infrastructure, and empower older adults to age in place with dignity.

The WFOT further stresses the importance of involving older people in decisions that affect their lives, recognizing them as active agents with valuable experiences and contributions to families, communities, and economies.

In its 'Ageing and Health' document, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) noted that while people are living longer, ageing often – but not always – comes with a decline in physical and mental health due to age-related conditions, such as arthritis, diabetes, dementia, and increased risk of falls. However, the WHO also emphasized that healthy ageing is possible. While genetics play a role, having a supportive environment that enables older adults to remain engaged in meaningful activities is equally important and can significantly enhance quality of life. In recognition of these challenges and opportunities, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly declared 2021–2030 the Decade of Healthy Ageing (2022) and appointed the WHO to lead its implementation.

This global initiative highlights the vital role of occupational science in understanding how meaningful activity supports healthy ageing, the importance of occupational justice in ensuring all older adults have equal access to these opportunities, and the contribution of occupational therapy in enabling individuals to engage in valued occupations that promote well-being and quality of life as they age.

Improving care for an ageing population

Building on this global perspective, the NHS published a document titled ‘Improving Care for Older People’ (NHS England, 2025), which addresses the challenges posed by an ageing population. It emphasizes the need for integrated care systems to work collaboratively across health and social care sectors to provide personalized support for older adults.

At the local level, ‘Ageing Well’ has been identified as a strategic priority. Local authorities, such as Hertfordshire County Council, highlight this in their ‘Public Health Strategy 2022–2027’ (Hertfordshire County Council, 2022), which outlines a holistic approach to supporting residents in ageing well. This includes promoting healthy, active, and socially connected lifestyles, reducing hospital admissions, and encouraging independence at home. The strategy emphasizes early identification of frailty and dementia, connecting individuals with tailored community services, addressing cultural preferences and social isolation, and ensuring that carers – who are also ageing – receive the support they need.

Data from Brent Council’s (2022) *Brent’s Population Across the Life Course (2022)* highlights a growing ageing population. However, with a 66% flu vaccine uptake, the data suggest proactive engagement in preventative health measures. In summary, the integration of occupational science, occupational justice, and occupational therapy provides a powerful framework for addressing the complex needs of an ageing population. From global initiatives like the WHO’s Decade of Healthy Ageing to national strategies by the NHS and local efforts such as Hertfordshire’s ‘Ageing Well’ programme, there is a shared commitment to promoting environments that support meaningful engagement, independence, and well-being in later life. Occupational science offers critical insights into how daily activities shape health and identity, while occupational therapy translates these insights into practical interventions that empower older adults to live fulfilling lives. As demographic trends continue to shift, these interdisciplinary approaches will be essential in ensuring that ageing is not only about longevity, but also about quality of life, dignity, and inclusion for all.

Occupational Gift

Caribbean gift to the reader: marinated chicken

Mr. X was a man whose occupational gift was extended far beyond the boundaries of conventional work – it was in every sense, a way of life. Even at the age of 86 years, he remained deeply committed to a life of responsibility, service and cultural integrity. His days were not defined by rest or retirement, but by purpose and contribution.

He was the embodiment of a value passed down through generations: ‘If something needed to be done, get up and do it.’ This simple but powerful principle guided every facet of his daily life, it was not just a saying for Mr. X; it was the foundation upon which he lived his life. Mr. X was not one to wait for others to act, nor did he believe in idle complaint. Instead, he lived by action, purpose, and routine, a structure that gave his life both order and profound meaning. These routines were not mundane; they were sacred to him, reflections of his commitment to live with integrity and consistency.

A gentleman of unwavering discipline, each day of Mr. X’s week was marked by specific tasks, almost like sacred rituals. These tasks weren’t burdens, they were opportunities to contribute, to take pride in what needed doing. His routines were less about habit and more about responsibility and fulfilment. Central among these routines was his involvement with his local Methodist Church, a cornerstone of his identity. The church was not merely a place of worship for Mr. X; it was a community, a sanctuary of tradition and fellowship that he served with heart and devotion.

As a trained chef, one of the most cherished aspects of Mr X’s weekly commitments was preparing a dish for the Sunday after-church meal. He often referred to his training as a chef echoing the French term: *mise en place*. This term refers to preparing and setting out all the ingredients, tools, and cookware required for a particular recipe. His chicken dish was no ordinary meal, it was a symbol of unity, hospitality, and culture. Mr. X’s contribution was consistent, heartfelt, and anticipated: his famous chicken drumsticks. This dish was more than food; it was an expression of love and a testament to his sense of duty.

The preparation for the dish was rooted in a love for flavour and precision. The preparation began well in advance. Thursday was his designated shopping day, and like clockwork, he would visit his local supermarket where he purchased among other items, two large bags of drumsticks. Friday night was the designated day when the chicken was cleaned and seasoned, with his special mix of ingredients, then left to marinate until Sunday morning.

The church service began at 11.00a.m., and he usually arrived at church about 30 minutes before it started. This meant that Mr. X started the baking process at 6a.m. in the morning to ensure the three pans of chicken was completed by the time he was ready to leave home. He usually added a variation of colours with sweet peppers to enhance the presentation of the dish.

This weekly contribution to the after-church meal was always anticipated and warmly welcomed by both members and church visitors. It was more than just a meal – it was a highlight of the fellowship. The true impact of Mr. X's dish became especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, when church gatherings were restricted. Despite the limitations, several church members reached out and specifically requested that Mr.X continue preparing his famous baked chicken. This heartfelt request not only demonstrated how cherished his cooking was but also gave Mr. X a renewed sense of purpose, connection, and personal value during a difficult time.

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