Specialist HIV OTs in the United Kingdom and Canada: a dying breed or a chance for renewal?


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Background

In countries such as Canada and the UK, people are living longer with HIV due to effective antiretroviral treatment. However now HIV diagnosis continues – over 6000 people are diagnosed every year with HIV in the UK. This has led to increasing numbers of people living with HIV in the UK, there are now over 100,000 people living with HIV.

Due to effective treatment, HIV is now considered a chronic condition. People living with HIV who are also ageing with associated impairments and co-morbidities.

This results in fluctuating health known as episodic disability. Numbers of statutory funded specialist HIV occupational therapy posts are decreasing: fewer than 10 posts now exist.

CUHRRC

- In 2009 the Canada-UK HIV Rehabilitation Research Collaborative (CUHRRC) was established following a meeting at Bartholomew’s Hospital in London funded by the Canadian Institute of Health Research. CUHRRC members include clinicians, researchers and people living with HIV.
- Lead to the inaugural International Forum on HIV and Rehabilitation Research, hosted in Toronto, Canada, attended by over 100 delegates (2013).
- Several UK HIV OTs attended and presented at the Forum.
- The OTs also visited public and third sector HIV facilities – St Michael’s Hospital and Casey House in Toronto, and the Dr Peter Centre in Vancouver.

The Future of HIV

- Living across the lifespan with HIV
- Uncertain effects of long term HIV and anti-retrovirals on all body systems
- Emerging evidence of HIV associated neurocognitive disorders
- Co-morbidities of ageing and HIV e.g. bone and cardiac health
- Issues for older LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) individuals living with HIV
- Issues for older people from culturally diverse backgrounds living with HIV, particularly in care homes
- Mental health in HIV
- Episodic disability and maintaining work and occupational roles
- Drugs and alcohol in an HIV context
- The challenge of maintaining quality as some services move from HIV specialist to mainstream

Service Provision

- In the past and currently HIV specialist posts are located within:
  - Acute hospitals
  - Community (Social Services and rehabilitation)
  - Community (non-NHS rehabilitation unit)
  - NHS and other funding cuts reducing specialist posts
  - Limited third sector employment opportunities

Research

- Limited funding opportunities
- One OT engaged in self-funded formal research
- A small number of OTs engaged in workplace audits and service development projects
- Few specialist posts
- Mostly in third sector

Service Provision

- Strong track record
- Organised infrastructure
- Well developed funding opportunities

Conclusions

- The complexity and challenges faced by people living with HIV are increasing as they age
- Occupational therapy skills in physical, cognitive and psychological assessment and rehabilitation make a valuable contribution to the clinical area of HIV
- With the ever changing funding landscape of the NHS, HIV and other funding cuts reducing occupational roles
- Ottawa Specialist OTs and other rehabilitation professionals to meet the complex rehabilitation needs of people living with HIV
- Given resource issues within the UK statutory sector, service provision by third sector organisations may offer additional and alternative opportunities
- Developing roles in emergent areas and creative approaches to funding are vital in ensuring opportunities are not lost for occupational therapy

References


Opportunities for OTs

- Developing roles in the third sector
- Long term rehabilitation
- Vocational rehabilitation
- Education for therapists working with specialist populations
- Working with drug and alcohol services
- Self management programmes
- CLS
- Functional improvement
- Emotional/ behavioural disorders
- Rehabilitation in HIV

Contacts and Resources

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RHIVA - http://www.bhiva.org/RHIVA.aspx
CUHRRC - http://cuhrrc.hivandrehab.ca

Delegates at the International Forum on HIV and Rehabilitation Research, Toronto, 2013

Elizabeth Stevens, OT

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