

Bookmarks: Internet resources for occupational therapy

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Until I worked in the NHS, I had absolutely no idea what occupational therapy (OT) was. Most lay people have an understanding of health terms, such as physiotherapy or paediatrics, but OT is a real area of mystery. I became aware of this when I was asked to do some evidence-based training in OT in my trust. I decided to look for good resources on the Internet and was surprised to find a real shortage of decent sites to support clinicians in this area.

Occupational therapy is described in *Wikipedia* (the online encyclopaedia)¹ as:

Skilled treatment that helps individuals achieve independence in all facets of their lives. It gives people the 'skills for the job of living' necessary for independent and satisfying lives.

Finding good information in OT is just about to get more difficult as the generally recognised core resource in the UK, The *Occupational Therapist portal* on NeLH,² is no longer being updated and will not transfer to the new National Library for Health. This is a real shame as it is a first stop shop for occupational therapists in terms of resources and links.

As the OT portal dies out, the next best resource is *OTdirect*.³ This is a non-profit making site voluntarily put together by enthusiasts in their own time. It is an excellent resource and seems to run as a co-operative with occupational therapists adding materials as they discover them. Considering that it is run in this way, it is pleasing to see that all of the links were up-to-date and relevant.

In terms of finding good quality resources in OT, one of the better sites is *OT Seeker*⁴ which is a free database that contains abstracts of systematic reviews and randomised controlled trials relevant to the subject. Unusually for a bibliographic database, the trials are critically appraised to a standard

format and then rated in terms of validity. Produced by two Australian universities, the database is a growing one, but is still relatively new having been launched in 2002.

The shortage of easily accessible good resources, means that one needs to rely on the various professional associations to act as a source of quality information.

The *British Association/College of Occupational Therapists*^{5,6} describes itself as 'the professional body for occupational therapy staff in the

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UK'. The association Web site is a strange one – for one, the page doesn't fit onto a browser, meaning that you have to navigate left and right (as well as up and down). There are a variety of home-page images – different ones which appear every time you go to the Web site. I find it inconsistent and quite confusing. Unfortunately, I suspect that much of the 'good stuff' on the page is hidden on the members home-page. Having said that, there is some good information in the 'OT as a Career' page which explains the requirements for someone considering a career in this area.

The *Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists*⁷ is an excellent site which has a wide range of resources freely available. For example, there is a 'Critically Appraised Papers' section for members which looks at current journal articles and appraises them. Interestingly, the site has information for potential 'consumers' of occupational therapy explaining where OT can help and in which areas of their life. As with the British Association, many of the core resources on the site require a membership password – something

which must be very frustrating for therapists wishing to access materials from another country.

Two US-based membership groups provide detailed information for OT professionals. The *American Occupational Therapy Foundation*⁸ is a practical site in nature, giving links to resources available on the Internet and organising conferences. The *American Occupational Therapy Association site*⁹ is useful in that it gives more background about OT, support for training staff and links to

publications. Although they are aimed at the same groups, the two sites and organisations seem to run independently of each other.

Finally, If you are inspired to choose OT as a career, the excellent NHS careers pages¹⁰ give good information about the subject, explaining what occupational therapists do and where they work. The site also gives information about training options, the qualifications needed, training programmes and career prospects. The only criticism I would have of the Webpage is that you have to get through a number of pages to find the one that you need.

Web sites

1. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupational_Therapy>.
2. <www.nelh.nhs.uk/ot/>.
3. <www.otdirect.co.uk/>.
4. <www.otseeker.com>.
5. <www.otseeker.com>.
6. <www.cot.co.uk/>.
7. <www.baot.org.uk/>.
8. <www.caot.ca/>.
9. <www.aotf.org/>.
10. <www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/home.html>.