

# How to host your local parliamentary representative at your occupational therapy service

By hosting your local parliamentarian or assembly member ('your representative') at your service, you can showcase the vital role occupational therapists play in health and social care. It's a chance to highlight the successes and challenges of your service with those who can help influence central government. By raising awareness at a political level, you can help shape policy and get more support for occupational therapists in your area and across the UK.

Health and social care are devolved in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. If you're a member in these countries, you might want to host your local Assembly Member (AM) in Wales, Member of Scottish Parliament (MSP) or your Member of Legislative Assembly in Northern Ireland (MLA).

## 1. Speak to your communications team

Before you begin, check with your supervisor, tutor, line manager and equivalent leader and communications teams (if you have one) to ensure that you have their support, and your organisation's policies and procedures support any planned activities.

## 2. Find your local representative, do your research, then reach out

Your MP/AM/[MSP](#)/MLA is your direct link to parliament or national assembly and can act as a voice for your service. Use [Find Your MP](#) to find out who your MP is or check the website of your nation's parliament or assembly.

Take some time to research your elected representative. They might be responsible for a particular area of policy or sit on a committee. Knowing this will give you an idea of the sorts of things they might be interested in hearing about or the sorts of messages they will be receptive to.

Once you've done this, you're ready to send an invitation. Include an overview of your service, explaining why the visit is important for their constituency work. Mention any specific issues or projects you would like to discuss. For instance, workforce challenges or waiting times.

Try and offer flexible dates and times for the visit. Ideally, during parliamentary recess or on a Friday when they're most likely to be in their constituency.

## 3. Prepare for the visit

If they accept, you'll be put in touch with their staff to arrange the visit. Remember to ask how long the visit is likely to be so that you can plan accordingly. Don't be surprised if you only have an hour or even 30 minutes of their time – but there's plenty you can pack in.

You can then start planning an engaging and informative experience. Your agenda could include:

- a warm welcome, introductions, and a briefing about your service.
- a guided tour of your facilities.
- interaction with staff, patients and service users. Make sure to get permission from your patients before involving them.
- time for a Q&A session to address their questions or concerns.

Then you can prepare what you want to speak to them about. They'll want to know the issues facing you and your service, including how its impacted you professionally and personally. Most importantly, they'll want to know how it's impacted your patients.

Have a think about the evidence you might need to make your case. Do you have figures to demonstrate the positive outcomes your service has had on your patients? Or can you show how your service helps reduce pressures on the NHS and social care? If you can, draw on examples of cost saving, or preventative measures implemented by your service to keep people healthy and independent for longer. Consider bringing this to life using real life experiences.

#### **4. During the visit**

Designate a senior staff member to greet them on arrival and provide a warm welcome. Consider providing an informational pack with key statistics, impact reports and case studies. They will likely be joined by one of their staff, who will help follow up on any actions taken.

Follow the itinerary, allowing them to see different aspects of occupational therapy and hear about the experiences of staff and service users. Take some photos which you can use to promote the visit.

Key the focus on how your service benefits the community, aligns with national priorities, and the support needed from policy makers. Be honest about some of the challenges you face – if its more resource that you need, your MP/AM/MSP/MLA is there to advocate for this to central government.

#### **5. After the visit**

Send an email to thank them after the meeting. If you committed to provide them with any more information, or a local press release, you could include this. Finally, think about how you might want to promote the visit. You can share a press release with the local press or promote on social media. Just make sure that you've agreed everything with the elected representative you hosted.

#### **6. Additional support for RCOT members**

As your membership body we're here to help. This guide offers some tips, but we're keen to know if you hear back from your representative and can support you for any visit. If you let us know about your meeting, we can advise on how to run the visit and may be able to join you to ensure that the day runs smoothly. We can offer insight on the person you are hosting and provide tips on handling press coverage during and after the visit. Contact the team on [Practice.Workforce@rcot.co.uk](mailto:Practice.Workforce@rcot.co.uk).

By inviting your representative to see your service, you're helping raise awareness of the essential role occupational therapists play in supporting communities, shaping health policy, and ensuring services like yours receive the recognition and support they deserve.