



Who we are and what we do

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Introduction

Allied Health Professions are a diverse workforce who deliver high-quality care to patients and service users across a wide range of care pathways and in a variety of settings. They play an important role in our health and social care services. This booklet provides a brief overview of Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) and the services they provide to the public.

Practical interventions from AHPs help people to recover movement and mobility, overcome visual problems, improve their nutrition and to develop communication and everyday living skills, allowing them to sustain and enjoy quality of life even when faced with life-limiting conditions.

AHPs are critical to the ongoing assessment, treatment and rehabilitation of patients throughout the illness episodes whether brief or long lasting.

AHPs are regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). All AHPs work within the HCPC code of practice to ensure that they work to the highest standard.

The professions listed below are 'protected titles', which means that only those individuals who have been appropriately trained and are registered with HCPC can work under any of the following titles:

- Art therapist
- Dietitian
- Dramatherapist
- Music therapist
- Occupational therapist
- Orthoptist
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- Paramedic
- Physiotherapist
- Podiatrist
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Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy which uses art for expression and communication. Art therapy is used to address emotional issues which may be confusing and distressing for the service user.

Art therapy is provided in groups or individually, depending on the service users' need. It is not a recreational activity or an art lesson, although the sessions can be enjoyable. Service users do not need to have any previous experience or expertise in art.

Art therapists work with children, young people, adults and older people. Service users may have a wide range of difficulties, disabilities or diagnoses. These can include emotional, behavioural or mental health problems, learning or physical disabilities, life-limiting conditions, neurological conditions and physical illnesses.

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Dietitians

Dietitians assess, diagnose and treat dietary and nutritional problems at an individual and wider public-health level. They work with both healthy and sick people (children and adults) in a variety of settings. Dietitians may work within hospitals, community, food industry, workplace, catering, education, sport, media or public health.

Dietitians use the most up-to-date public health and scientific research on food, health and disease which they translate into practical guidance to enable people to make appropriate lifestyle and food choices. They use a range of communication methods and techniques, including behaviour change skills, to help people achieve positive nutritional outcomes.

Dietitians often work as integral members of multi-disciplinary teams to treat complex clinical conditions such as:

- malnutrition;
- diabetes;
- eating disorders;
- kidney disease;
- food allergy and intolerance;
- stroke;
- intestinal failure;
- cancer;
- hypertension;
- bowel disorders, including irritable bowel syndrome.

Dietitians provide advice to caterers to ensure good nutrition within health and social care settings. They plan and implement public health programmes to promote health and prevent nutrition related diseases. Dietitians also train and educate other health and social care workers, as well as community and voluntary groups.

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Dramatherapists

Dramatherapists are trained to enable service users to find the most suitable medium for them to engage in group or individual therapy to address and resolve, or make troubling issues more bearable. Service users who are referred to a dramatherapist do not need to have previous experience or skill in acting, theatre or drama.

Dramatherapy is a form of psychological therapy in which all of the performance arts are utilised within the therapeutic relationship. This approach can be particularly helpful for people with difficulties in communicating as it engages the body and imagination.

Dramatherapists are both artists and clinicians who draw on their training in theatre, drama and therapy to create methods to engage service users in effecting psychological, emotional and social changes. The therapy gives equal validity to body and mind within the dramatic context. Stories, myths, playtexts, puppetry, masks and improvisation are examples of the range of artistic interventions a dramatherapist may employ. These interventions will enable the service user to explore difficult and painful life experiences through an indirect approach.

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Music therapists

Music therapists use music with service users of all ages whose lives have been affected by life events, disability, illness, trauma or difficulties associated with ageing.

Music therapy is an established psychological clinical intervention. Music therapists aim to achieve a better quality of life for service users through prevention, early intervention, rehabilitation or treatment. Music therapists work in a diverse range of settings such as health and social care, education, the charitable sector, criminal justice and forensic services. They work across acute settings, rehabilitation centres, community settings, specialist music therapy centres, and in people's homes.

Music therapy can help service users connect with themselves and others and can be exciting or calming, joyful or poignant. Music therapy can stir memories and powerfully resonate feelings, helping service users to express themselves and communicate with others.

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Occupational therapists

Occupational therapists provide practical support to enable people to recover and overcome barriers that prevent them from doing the occupations (activities) that matter to them. They work with people of all ages, who are experiencing difficulties through injury, illness or disability or a major life change.

Occupational therapists do this through analysing a person's strengths, skills and needs in carrying out day to day activities. They take into account the environment (home, school, work, local community) and then work with the person to overcome barriers that are stopping them from doing what they want and need to do.

They can do this in a number of ways, for example through recommending adaptations to the service user's home, teaching people techniques to compensate for poor memory, working with parents and teachers to help promote children's development and independence skills, and helping to develop people's confidence to get out and about again.

Occupational therapists deliver this through services such as reablement, stroke rehabilitation, prescribing wheelchairs, and condition management programmes to help people return to work.

Occupational therapists believe that actively participating in daily life is essential to people's health and wellbeing.

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Orthoptists

Orthoptists specialise in assessing, diagnosing and treating a variety of eye conditions in very young babies, children, adults and older people. Orthoptists are specialists in assessing visual function in the pre and non-verbal service user.

Orthoptists work with service users with squints, amblyopia (lazy eye), double vision and eye movement problems due to a range of conditions such as neurological, stroke, trauma and diabetes.

Orthoptists are part of the eye team working with ophthalmologists (eye consultants) and opticians. Orthoptists also provide a coordinated eye service with health visitors, school nurses and GPs.

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Orthotists

Orthotists specialise in assessing and providing gait analysis and engineering solutions to service users with problems of the neuro-muscular and skeletal systems. They are trained in mechanics, bio-mechanics, and material science along with anatomy, physiology and pathophysiology.

Orthotists design and provide orthoses (splints) that modify the structural or functional characteristics of the service users' neuro-muscular and skeletal systems, helping service users to be more mobile, eliminate gait irregularities, reduce falls and pain, and prevent and facilitate the healing of ulcers.

Orthotists are also qualified to modify CE marked orthoses or the components of these. They treat service users with a wide range of conditions including diabetes, arthritis, cerebral palsy, stroke, spina bifida, scoliosis, muscular-skeletal problems, sports injuries and trauma. While they work as autonomous practitioners they form part of multidisciplinary teams such as the diabetic foot team or neuro-rehabilitation team.

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Paramedics

Although the term 'paramedic' is traditionally associated with emergency ambulance, pre-hospital care, the role has undergone enormous development in recent years and paramedics now work in a variety of settings.

Paramedics are often Health and Social Care Services' first point of contact with service users. Paramedics encounter patients in a wide variety of emergency and non-emergency settings, providing high quality and compassionate care for a broad range of conditions, illness and injury. By its nature, the work is varied, diverse, can be unpredictable and involve 24/7 response.

Paramedics assess, diagnose, treat and manage patients, as well as conveying them, when necessary, to further care. The work may be as part of an emergency ambulance crew, as a solo rapid responder, on the helicopter air ambulance or as part of a hazardous area response team. Paramedics also work in control centres, providing telephone advice to callers or referring them to an appropriate point of care. Paramedics involved in advanced practice can also work in primary care practices or emergency departments.

Working on their own or with one colleague, paramedics make clinical decisions for which they are accountable. As well as direct contact with patients, paramedics also deal with relatives, friends and members of the public, often in distressing situations. Work can involve close liaison with other teams, such as doctors and nurses in hospital emergency departments, GPs, other AHPs, mental health teams or working alongside the police, fire and rescue services.

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Physiotherapists

Physiotherapists help people affected by injury, illness or disability through movement and exercise, respiratory care, manual therapy, education and advice. They also help service users manage pain and prevent disease.

At the core of intervention is involving service users in their own care, through education, awareness, empowerment and participation in their treatment.

Physiotherapists help to encourage development and facilitate recovery, enabling people to stay in work while helping them to remain independent for as long as possible.

Physiotherapy takes a 'whole person' approach to health and wellbeing, which includes the patient's general lifestyle.

Physiotherapy helps with back pain or sudden injury, managing long-term medical conditions such as asthma, and in preparing for childbirth or a sporting event.

Physiotherapists use their knowledge and skills to improve a range of conditions associated with different systems of the body, such as:

- neurological (stroke, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's);
- neuro-musculoskeletal (back pain, whiplash associated disorders, sports injuries, arthritis);
- cardiovascular (chronic heart disease, rehabilitation after a heart attack);
- respiratory (asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cystic fibrosis).

Physiotherapists work in a variety of specialisms and locations in health and social care and other settings.

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Podiatrists work to improve the mobility, independence and quality of life for their service users by assessing, diagnosing and treating a wide range of problems affecting the feet and lower limbs, with an emphasis on preventative care.

Podiatrists work across a range of clinical settings in the community and hospital environment.

Podiatrists provide a comprehensive foot health service, including:

- nail surgery;
- podiatric management of foot pathology for patients with the following conditions: diabetes, vascular, oncology, rheumatology and renal disease;
- musculo-skeletal conditions/ biomechanics – the treatment of mechanical foot problems with special appliances or insoles;
- Integrated Clinical Assessment and Treatment Service (ICATS).

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Prosthetists

Prosthetists specialise in assessing and providing gait analysis and engineering solutions to service users with limb loss. They are trained in mechanics, bio-mechanics, and material science along with anatomy, physiology and pathophysiology.

Prosthetists design and provide prostheses that replicate the structural or functional characteristics of the service user's absent limb. They are also qualified to modify CE marked prostheses or the components of these. They treat service users with congenital limb loss as well as loss due to diabetes, reduced vascularity, infection and trauma. While they are autonomous practitioners they also work closely with physiotherapists and occupational therapists as part of the multidisciplinary amputee rehabilitation teams.

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Radiographers

Radiographers take images of the insides of patients' bodies to diagnose injury or disease. They also care for and treat people with cancer.

Radiographers look after people who are unwell or in pain who be anxious or uncertain about what is going to happen. They use their wide range of skills and training to deliver a sensitive, patient-focused healthcare service in imaging and radiotherapy.

There are two types of radiographer: diagnostic and therapeutic.

Both diagnostic and therapeutic radiographers have safety and quality at the forefront of their practice.

Diagnostic radiographers employ a wide range of imaging techniques such as CT, MRI, Ultrasound and plain film to produce high quality images of injury or disease. Often they interpret the images so that correct treatment can be provided. They undertake diagnostic work and independent reporting as part of a multidisciplinary team. They are a key part of the delivery of acute as well as community based services. Early diagnosis is a vital step in care pathways and the delivery of any subsequent treatment. Health surveillance screening such as mammography has a very important role to play in the early detection of cancer.

Therapeutic radiographers are the only health professionals to plan and deliver radiotherapy in the treatment of cancer. They provide both curative and palliative treatments utilising complex technology as well as offering a high degree of emotional support to their patients.



Speech and language therapists

Speech and language therapists provide assessment, diagnosis, treatment and support for children and adults of all ages who have difficulties with speech, language, communication, eating, drinking and swallowing.

Speech and language therapists work directly with service users and their carers to provide them with individualised support. They also work closely with teachers, doctors, nurses, other AHPs and psychologists to develop intervention programmes according to the service user's individual needs.

Speech and language therapists play a key role in rehabilitation, improving the quality of people's lives and helping them to achieve their potential. They provide guidance and advice on how to help promote the best quality care and support for those with communication and swallowing difficulties.

They work in a variety of locations across health and social care, local communities, education facilities, voluntary agencies and in the independent sector.

Speech and language therapists encourage service users and/or carers to be involved in their own care by providing information and encouraging active participation in the intervention process. They aim to support and empower service users or families to manage the communication difficulty themselves.





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