



## Summary Report – Gemma Fryer

Gemma Fryer, a 3rd year student from Coventry University received the student award from the Royal College of Occupational Therapists in January 2018. The £500 award contributed to a 3 week placement in Anuradhapura teaching hospital, the third largest hospital in Sri Lanka. The placement was completed in June 2018.

The placement was arranged so that a week was spent with each OT in the department. There are only 3 occupational therapists in the hospital that cover paediatrics, burns, plastic surgery, mental health and hand therapy. Occupational therapists will often cover each other's clinics when annual leave or sickness results in absence, a difference in practice but a testament to the exceptional knowledge and skill base of the occupational therapists in the dept.

Prior to and during the placement, basic Sinhalese was learnt and often practiced with bemused service users to contribute towards building a positive therapeutic relationship. Patients appeared to appreciate the effort of learning Sinhalese and would often teach new words and phrases to expand the lines of communication. This was especially prevalent during the week with the mental health occupational therapist, which was based in both a ward and day centre setting. Patients were welcoming and encouraged participation in their groups. Music group was a particularly enjoyable experience to be part of, witnessing patients and staff singing and dancing. The meaning behind this activity for the patients was evident and it was an honour to a part of the group. It was interesting to witness the similarities in with UK occupational therapy practice; however, a notable difference was the lack of psychology input, which resulted in the occupational therapist delivering Cognitive Behavioural Therapy courses to patients alongside her own duties.

The second week was spent with the physical health occupational therapist who accepted referrals from many departments within the hospital as well as running the outpatient clinic. The week predominantly consisted of hand therapy and a variety of splinting techniques were witnessed. The therapist was creative and resourceful, using elastic bands and glue as a lever to promote extension of a finger. Active participation was encouraged in both assessment and intervention which resulted in remodelling of many splints and a very patient educator.

The final week in paediatrics saw an occupational therapist seeing up to 20 patients in one morning. The environment was very small and lacked resources; however, creativity was used when assessing patients with a variety of conditions. Practice was based on UK, US and Australia assessment tools and standards, the occupational therapists was very keen to learn more about paediatric interventions from the UK to provide more of an evidence base for her practice. Most children were fascinated to see a white British student in their clinic; this would sometimes encourage a rapport. Knowledge of this area of practice was limited prior to the placement but the occupational therapist took time to explain conditions and treatments, and as a result, new knowledge was gained.

Participating in this placement has provided an invaluable learning experience. It was a privilege to witness the exceptional knowledge and skills being practiced by the inspirational occupational therapists. Meeting so many wonderful patients and staff has been an unforgettable experience that has provided valuable lessons not only in practice, but in humanity. Thank you RCOT.