What can AHPs offer in mental health settings?

Allied health professions (AHPs) are the third largest workforce in the NHS. There are more than 187,00 (July 2021) registered AHPs in the UK. There are 14 AHP professions.

Why are AHPs important in mental health practice?

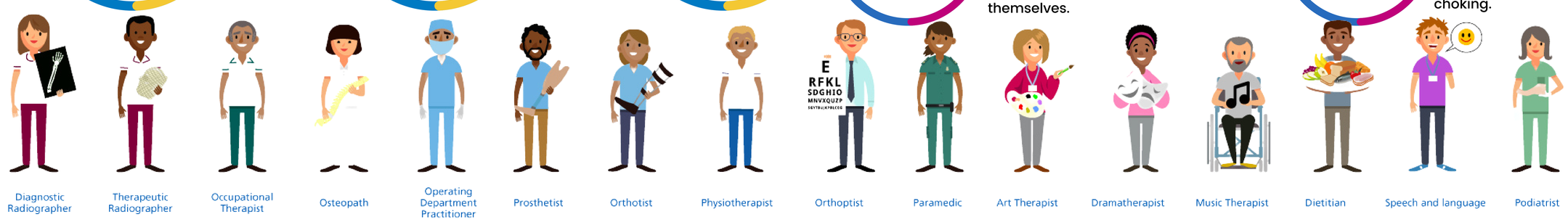
The NHS Long Term Plan describes AHPs as playing a central role in the delivery of person-centred care to help meet the changing demands the NHS is facing. The Mental Health Workforce Plan for England' (2017) also highlights the vital and varied role of AHPs as first responders, in diagnosis, self-management, rehabilitation, and recovery of everyday life.

AHPs are the key to transforming health, care, and wellbeing. Working at the top of their competencies and skills, AHPs lead mental health teams to new ways of working. Their expertise in rehabilitation and enablement is vital to move away from over-reliance on hospitals and towards professional interventions across health and social care settings.

What is the role of AHPs in services for people with mental health conditions?

AHPs are employed in health and care services to diagnose, treat, and support individuals to overcome the physical challenges, that can be associated with their mental health conditions.

- Chiropodists/ Podiatrists
- Orthoptists
- Prosthetists and Orthotists
- Operating Department Practitioners
- Osteopaths
- Radiographers



What is the role of AHPs in in specialist practice for people with mental health conditions?

AHPs in mental health practice can work in a wide range of service settings including primary care, community, hospital, education, criminal justice, community voluntary sectors. Positioned across care pathways, settings, and age groups, AHPs bring expertise and efficiency to services by:

- Bringing connectivity of physical and mental health interventions to tackle health inequalities.
- Help maintain healthy lifestyles through health promoting intervention.
- Delivering specialist early and longer-term, mental health intervention with users of services, their families, and carer's.
- Working with people with mild-moderate conditions through to those with complex care needs.
- Offering a diverse range of assessments and interventions to support people's rehabilitation and recovery.
- Enabling integrated pathways for services users to have all their needs addressed.
- Working in multi professional roles and in extended role practice, such as care co-ordinators, advanced and consultant practitioners, and in the responsible clinician role (occupational therapists).
- Developing integrated care pathways to provide a strategic overview for commissioning activities.
- Working in partnership with the person and their family, the multidisciplinary team, and local communities to optimise and maintain the person's physical and mental health, function, and quality of life.

In mental health settings, AHPs are specifically employed to support persons experiencing mental illness conditions

Art therapists offer psychological therapies which are not solely reliant on verbal communication. Art-making and creative, sensory, and engaging approaches are used to assist people to explore and express feelings, emotions, and distress in a safe, contained therapeutic space.

Dietitians understand the complex relationship between nutrition, mental health, and the impact on physical health. Their intervention helps to manage dietary concerns that are related to a person's mental health conditions

Drama therapists offer psychological therapies to enable people to express emotion. Interventions may include drama, story-making, and movement to enable people to explore a wide variety of different issues in an indirect way leading to psychological, emotional, and social changes.

Music Therapists offer psychological therapies which use the innate qualities of music, musical instruments, and the voice to explore and express feelings and emotions. They help people to use music-making to explore and connect with the world and express themselves.

Occupational therapists have expertise in rehabilitation, enabling people to recover their independence and participation in everyday life activities (occupations) which hold personal importance and meaning. They are dual trained in mental and physical healthcare at the pre-registration level.

Paramedics typically employed as first responders in emergency services, paramedics assess patients' mental health and physical health. They can employ essential community treatment to reduce unnecessary and stressful hospital admission for those with mental health conditions.

Physiotherapists provide preventative health interventions, physiotherapeutic treatment, and individualised exercise/rehabilitation programs to optimize wellbeing, promote independence, functional movement, and physical activity.

Speech and language therapists have expertise in enabling people to understand the nature and impact of their communication difficulties to help them participate in decisions about their care and engage in psychological therapies to support recovery. They support people with swallowing problems who are at risk of aspiration and choking.