Therapy interventions for children with neurodisabilities: a qualitative scoping study

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Declared competing interests of authors: none

Plain English summary

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Health Technology Assessment 2018; Vol. 22: No. 3
DOI: 10.3310/hta22030

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Families and professionals agree that there needs to be more research on therapy interventions (physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy) for children with neurodisabilities. To aid decisions about what, or whether, to fund research on this topic, the National Institute for Health Research commissioned a small scoping study. The study’s purpose was to describe current practices and schools of thought, ascertain views about the impacts that therapy interventions have on children’s lives and how we should measure those impacts, and hear about priorities for future research. The study focused on children with a non-progressive neurodisability in which the main impact is on physical functioning or abilities, for example cerebral palsy, hemiplegia, spina bifida, some genetic conditions and acquired brain injury. More than 70 professionals (therapists, service managers, doctors and school staff) and 25 parents took part in this study, either through an individual interview or by joining a focus group discussion.

The study found that all therapies are undergoing many changes to the way they work and how their services are structured and organised. This is partly as result of reduced resources, but changes in beliefs and thinking about therapy interventions also have a large part to play. There was strong agreement that these therapies should be helping children to participate in everyday life as much as possible. Study participants also agreed that therapies could have very positive impacts on children’s lives. However, many also believed that more research was needed to understand how, and in what ways, therapies affect children, and how best to capture, or measure, this. In terms of research priorities, evaluations of new and emerging approaches to working with children and families, and models of delivering therapy services, received stronger consistent support than evaluations of specific interventions.
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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HTA programme as project number 13/05/11. The contractual start date was in May 2015. The draft report began editorial review in May 2017 and was accepted for publication in September 2017. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HTA editors and publisher have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors’ report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the draft document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health.

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