

Evidence Brief: AHP Support Workers

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Produced by the Knowledge Management team Evidence Briefs offer an overview of the published reports, research, and evidence on a workforce-related topic.

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- [Complete Evidence Brief list – link for External staff](#)

Key publications – the big picture

[NHS Long Term Workforce Plan](#)

NHS England, 2023
updated January 2024

Support workers, both clinical and administrative, are an important part of wider multidisciplinary teams, enabling more effective and efficient working. They contribute to addressing critical workforce capacity constraints while providing high quality, personalised care to patients. These include assistant practitioner and technician roles, such as occupational therapy assistants, which can be key integrators across health and social care. There will be a continued focus on supporting the recruitment and retention of these groups, including:

- maternity support workers through the Competency, Education and Career Development Framework [226](#)
- AHP support workers, through growth of apprenticeships and the development of a Competency, Education and Career Development Framework [227](#)
- healthcare support workers, through the NHS England programme [228](#) (recruitment, induction and career pathways)

[Allied Health Professions' Support Worker Strategy Impact Evaluation](#)

King's Business School, February 2023

This report seeks to provide a formal evaluation of the anticipated benefits and impact of Health Education England's (HEE's) national Allied Health Professions (AHP) support workforce programme. It adds to the evidence base for supporting, developing, and deploying support workers and can be used to support organisations to write business cases aimed at developing and deploying the AHP support workforce.

[The Allied Health Professions \(AHPs\) Strategy for England](#)

NHS England, June 2022

The [NHS Long Term Plan](#) acknowledges the essential role for AHPs in supporting the NHS to meet demand. As instructed by this plan (p82, section 4.20), The AHP Strategy for England: AHPs Deliver builds on its predecessor, accentuating the impact AHPs have on delivering excellence in health and care.

This new strategy is for the whole AHP community: support workers, assistant practitioners, registered professionals, pre-registration apprentices and students. It is inclusive and reflects how AHPs work in multidisciplinary teams, so that those who identify as part of the AHP community working in a variety of health and care sectors can use it to continually improve and redesign services.

[Developing the role of AHP Support Workers](#)

Health Education England

The Allied Health Professions Support Workforce plays an important role in delivering safe and effective care for service users across health and care. We have spoken to members of the AHP workforce, and they have shared their thoughts and concerns with us.

We need to ensure that our AHP support workforce have the right knowledge and skills, are supported by training and education, and have access to opportunities for career progression. This will ensure that patients, service users and their families and carers have access to a skilled and well-trained workforce.

We are working collaboratively with employers, NHS England, royal colleges, professional bodies, Trade unions and stakeholders to achieve our programme aims.

[Allied Health Professions' Support Workforce: A guide to embedding public health in practice](#)

Health Education England, 2022

This guide provides a resource for support workers and their line managers to clarify the four domains of public health and describe how AHP support worker roles benefit the whole population's health and wellbeing. It is one of several associated Guides that Health Education England (HEE) has published to support the [AHP Support Worker Competency, Education and Career Development Framework](#). The Framework is one element of HEE's AHP workforce strategy, which aims to build capacity and capability across the professions and secure the future workforce nationally, regionally, and locally.

[We are the NHS: People Plan 2020/21 – action for us all](#)

NHS England, July 2020

This plan sets out actions to support transformation across the whole NHS. It focuses on how we must all continue to look after each other and foster a culture of inclusion and belonging, as well as action to grow our workforce, train our people, and work together differently to deliver patient care. The principles underpinning the action through 2020/21 must endure beyond that time.

See p. 43 "Increasing local recruitment: Employers must increase their recruitment to roles such as clinical support workers and, in doing so, highlight the importance of these roles for patients and other healthcare workers as well as potential career pathways to other registered roles."

Evaluations

[North East and Yorkshire regional synthesis of AHP Workforce Plans](#)

Sheffield Hallam University, July 2023

The NHS England North East and Yorkshire (NEY) region covers a wide geographical area and includes four Integrated Care Systems which are Humber and North Yorkshire (HNY), North East North Cumbria (NENC), South Yorkshire (SY) and West Yorkshire (WY). The 15 Allied Health Professions (AHPs) represent the third largest clinical workforce in health, and a national Allied Health Professions Workforce Supply Project was commissioned which required all NHS Trusts in England to produce an 18-month AHP workforce supply strategy report by July 2022. This report is a synthesis of the AHP workforce plans submitted by 31 NHS Trusts within the former Health Education England (HEE) North-East and Yorkshire footprint.

- Support worker supply and demand p.16
- Action plans for development of the AHP support workforce, resources and risks p.17

[The development of the allied health support workforce: An evaluation for Health Education England](#)

Health and Society Knowledge Exchange, University of Cumbria, September 2020

Health and Society Knowledge Exchange (HASKE) was commissioned by Health Education England (HEE) to evaluate the development of the support workforce across the fourteen allied health professions. This project aimed to map the existing allied health support workforce and bring together current knowledge and examples of workforce development. It was therefore delivered in close dialogue with the related project developing the enabling Education and Career Framework. The analysis and conclusions of the evaluation were used to produce a toolkit to enable departmental managers to successfully prepare for and implement the framework.

[Allied Health Services Support Worker Policy Landscape End of study report](#)

Allied Health Solutions, 2017

This study was commissioned to gain a greater understanding as to how allied health support workers (AHSWs) are employed and deployed in three areas of North Central and East London: 1. Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge 2. Barnet 3. Tower Hamlets It also aimed to gather evidence about the education and training needs of the AHSWs and raise the local Allied Health Professionals' (AHPs) awareness of current support worker policy landscape. Since the publication of the Francis Inquiry into Mid-Staffordshire Foundation Trust there has been an increasing appreciation of the importance of the support workforce in delivering healthcare, and the potential this group of workers has to significantly enhance the patient experience. Many of the recent studies and policy developments have focussed on the nursing support workforce. This study, however, has concentrated solely on the support workforce that is employed in services delivered by AHPs.

[Allied health professions: support workforce training, education and careers](#)

Health Education England 2021

Support workers, senior support workers, assistants, and assistant practitioners work in, with and alongside the allied health professions (AHPs), providing high quality, life changing care across a range of acute and community services. Access to training and education, and clear career pathways, for this crucial workforce is essential to meeting the needs of patients, populations, and future healthcare. This summary resource supports Chief AHPs, AHP faculties, workforce leads and others. It includes:

- Examples of support roles working with the allied health professions.
- Training and education to support high quality care and service delivery.
- Career progression via apprenticeships.

Role descriptions and frameworks

[AHP Public Health Role Descriptors](#)

Royal Society for Public Health

AHPs play a crucial role in supporting the public's health. These descriptions, and the accompanying handbook, highlight their contributions across the four key domains of public health: the wider determinants of health, health improvement, population health, health protection, and health inequalities. They focus on where and how AHP support worker roles can influence and improve the public's health and encourage the reader to reflect on their current and potential roles and responsibilities. These descriptors provide a range of examples of the different ways each AHP profession engages in public health. The list is not intended to be exhaustive. Many examples will span more than one area of public health practice so for the purpose of simplicity these have been positioned in the most obvious domain.

[Allied Health Professional Band 4 Assistant Practitioner Consultation with Professional Bodies](#)

The British Association of Prosthetists and Orthotists (BAPO), 2020

The AHP council, which is part of South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw Integrated Care System (SYB ICS), was keen to explore apprenticeships that support AHPs. Therefore, a working group was established to consider developing a framework to support the establishment and expansion of Band 4 AHP Assistant Practitioner roles in the ICS, utilising the Level 5 apprenticeship as appropriate. This report is a result of one of the scoping exercises.

Case Studies

[AHP Support Worker Case Studies](#) Health Education England

Case studies from:

- Emergency Care
- Cancer and diagnostics
- Social care
- Outpatient services
- General medical
- Paediatrics
- Mental health
- Community
- Theatres
- Education

[Case studies for the AHP support workforce and accreditation project](#) Royal College of Podiatry

Two case studies of podiatry support workers.

[Rehabilitation Support Worker Resource Pack](#)

NHS England (Produced by the Workforce Working Group of the London Stroke Clinical Network & ISDN), June 2023

See page 10 'Case Studies'

[Winners at Celebrating Inspirational AHP Support Workforce National Awards](#)

Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust, January 2023

One of our members of staff, Zanya Petken has been recognised for their exceptional work and outstanding efforts at the Celebrating Inspirational AHP Support Workforce National Awards which took place in December.

The awards showcase the brilliant work carried out by Allied Health Professionals (AHP) support workers and shines a

spotlight on the AHP lead support worker roles and case studies.

[Celebrating success - case studies of excellent practice and career progression](#) Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust, 2022

The Star for workforce redesign

More resources and tools are available in the AHP Quick Reference Guides Upskilling section of the [HEE Star](#).

Alternatively, search for 'Allied Health' or 'support worker' in the search bar.

National Data Programme

Workforce, Training and Education staff can look at the [National Data Warehouse \(NDL\)](#) SharePoint site to find out more about datasets and Tableau products.

Published Peer Reviewed Research

Impact

[A therapy assistant in the intensive care unit \(ICU\): a pilot project](#)

Abstract only*

Source: Physiotherapy 105

Publication date: 2019

To evaluate the use and impact of a Band 4 Therapy Assistant (TA) in supporting rehabilitation in Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) and Physiotherapy (PT) in an ICU.

[Implementation of an advanced occupational therapy assistant-led groups programme in aged care rehabilitation](#) (Australian study) Abstract only*

Source: Australian Occupational Therapy Journal
Publication date: December 2013

Publication date: December 2013

The use of support workers such as occupational therapy assistants is emerging as a strategy to enhance the health workforce, but there has been little evaluation of the feasibility of expanding support worker roles and responsibilities. This study aimed to implement an advanced occupational therapy assistant-led groups programme in a subacute aged care rehabilitation setting and to evaluate the impact on the clinical outcomes of group participants. Conclusion: The introduction of an advanced occupational therapy assistant to replace an occupational therapist in facilitating a groups programme in aged care rehabilitation did not result in a decline in patient outcomes. However, the results should be interpreted tentatively given the study limitations and the advanced skills of the assistant involved. Further more rigorous longer term research with a larger sample is required.

Role development

[Allied Health Professions in Research: The Forgotten Workforce](#)

Source: Internet Journal of Allied Health Sciences and Practice 21 (4)

Publication date: 2023

Purpose: To understand the experience, involvement, and perceived importance of research among allied health professions and identify how robust research culture might be established in secondary care. Conclusion(s): Involvement in research provides allied health professionals opportunities for career development, job satisfaction and meaningful clinical impact. National Health Service Trusts should provide

infrastructure to support research activity in recognition of their skills and potential to increase research capacity for the benefit of patients.

[Developing a best practice framework for musculoskeletal outpatient physiotherapy delegation: the MOPeD mixed-methods research study protocol](#)

Source: BMJ Open

Publication date: 2023

Physiotherapy assistants/support workers are an important part of the physiotherapy workforce in the UK. Many of them work in National Health Service (NHS) physiotherapy outpatient services treating patients with musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions. In many services, they take responsibility, under professional supervision, for types of clinical work traditionally undertaken by physiotherapists such as leading exercise classes and treating individual patients. Nevertheless, their role(s) are relatively undefined and as such, there is considerable variation in the duties and tasks they undertake. This study aims to design a framework of 'best practice' in delegation to guide the work of clinicians in NHS physiotherapy MSK services and facilitate standardisation of practice to ensure that patients receive safe and effective treatment by the most appropriate person.

[Occupational Therapist and Occupational Therapy Assistant: We are Proud of These Titles](#)

Source: The Open Journal of Occupational Therapy

Publication date: 2023

As the editors of the Open Journal of Occupational Therapy (OJOT), we have high regard for the roles of occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants and appreciate the delineation of these roles and the value of each as described by the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) and the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT). According to AOTA and WFOT, occupational therapists are

autonomous health care professionals who promote participation in daily activities that give value and meaning to life. They are responsible and accountable for all aspects of occupational therapy service delivery, including the safety and effectiveness of their services (AOTA, 2021; WFOT, 2023, para. 3). Occupational therapy assistants are health care professionals with expertise in carrying out and modifying occupational therapy treatment plans and provide “occupational therapy services only under the supervision of and in partnership with the occupational therapist” (AOTA, 2021).

[Developments in allied health professionals' role in UK neonatal units: a speech and language therapy perspective](#)

Source: Infant 17(4)

Publication date: 2021

The recent Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT) survey (2019) has highlighted the significant lack of allied health professional (AHP) provision in neonatal care in the UK. Speech and language therapists (SLT) are part of the AHP workforce currently under-represented in neonatal care. This article summarises how SLTs are addressing the feeding and early communication service requirements and SLT skills needed to support newborn infants and families, and contributing to the wider multidisciplinary neonatal care team.

[Extended roles for allied health professionals: an updated systematic review of the evidence](#)

Source: Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare

Publication date: 2014

Background: Internationally, health care services are under increasing pressure to provide high quality, accessible, timely interventions to an ever increasing aging population, with finite resources. Extended scope roles for allied health professionals is one strategy that could be undertaken by health care services to meet this demand. This review builds upon an

earlier paper published in 2006 on the evidence relating to the impact extended scope roles have on health care services. Methods: A systematic review of the literature focused on extended scope roles in three allied health professional groups, ie, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and speech pathology, was conducted. The search strategy mirrored an earlier systematic review methodology and was designed to include articles from 2005 onwards. All peer-reviewed published papers with evidence relating to effects on patients, other professionals, or the health service were included. All papers were critically appraised prior to data extraction. Results: A total of 1,000 articles were identified by the search strategy; 254 articles were screened for relevance and 21 progressed to data extraction for inclusion in the systematic review. Conclusion: Literature supporting extended scope roles exists; however, despite the earlier review calling for more robust evaluations regarding the impact on patient outcomes, cost-effectiveness, training requirements, niche identification, or sustainability, there appears to be limited research reported on the topic in the last 7 years. The evidence available suggests that extended scope practice allied health practitioners could be a cost-effective and consumer-accepted investment that health services can make to improve patient outcomes

[Allied health assistants and what they do: A systematic review of the literature](#)

Source: Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare

Publication date: 2010

Allied health assistants (AHAs) are an emerging group in allied health practice with the potential to improve quality of care and safety of patients. This systematic review summarizes the evidence regarding the roles and responsibilities of AHAs and describes the benefits and barriers to utilizing AHAs in current health care settings.

Conclusions: There is consensus in the literature that AHAs make a valuable contribution to allied health care. Whilst there are clear advantages associated with the use of AHAs to support allied health service delivery, ongoing barriers to their effective use persist.

[Defining and identifying common elements of and contextual influences on the roles of support workers in health and social care: a thematic analysis of the literature](#) Abstract only*

Source: Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice

Publication date: 2010

Rationale, aims and objectives: Support workers are the largest single group of staff involved in the delivery of health and social care in the UK; however, their roles are heterogeneous and are influenced by several contextual factors. The aim of this study was to elucidate the contribution of the elements and context of work undertaken by support workers in health and social care. Methods: Thematic review of the literature 2005/2006, updated in 2008.

Results: A total of 134 papers were included in the review, from which we identified four domains of work and four core roles of support workers. The four domains of support worker work are direct care, indirect care, administration and facilitation. The four 'core' attributes of support worker roles were being a helper/enabler, a companion, a facilitator and a monitor. The more 'technical' components of support worker roles are then shaped by contextual factors such as staffing levels and the delegation processes.

Conclusion: Despite the heterogeneity of support worker roles, there are some uniting 'generic' features, which may form some or all of the role of these practitioners. Contextual factors influence the specific technical aspects of the support role, accounting in part for their heterogeneous role.

Training and education

[Supporting AHP students: A resource for non-registered AHP support staff](#) Abstract only*

Source: Physiotherapy 113

Publication date: December 2021

Purpose: Practice placement education (PPE) is a key component of healthcare training and therefore it's essential that PPE provides a supportive and safe learning environment for students (HCPC, 2017). In searching for innovative ways to increase our practice learning experience and capacity for PPE and from student feedback we identified the significant role our non-qualified workforce play in PPE, not only in improving the quality and pastoral support for students but also as role models with a wealth of knowledge and skills to share. Therefore a 1-day course was created to provide our non-qualified workforce with the skills to directly support PPE and work alongside clinical educators (CEs). Through this we aim to enhance our placement quality, capacity and productivity.

[Emotional labour in palliative and end-of-life care communication: A qualitative study with generalist palliative care providers](#) Abstract only*

Source: Patient Education & Counseling 102(3)

Publication: 2019

Objective: To explore generalist palliative care providers' experiences of emotional labour when undertaking conversations around palliative and end-of-life care with patients and families, to inform supportive strategies.

Conclusion: Diverse strategies to support the emotional needs of generalist staff are crucial to ensure high-quality end-of-life care and communication, and to support staff well-being.

[Value of Occupational Therapy Assistant Education to the Profession](#) Abstract only* (US paper)

Source: American Journal of Occupational Therapy 69

Date of publication: 2019

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) recognizes the value, necessity, and viability of occupational therapy assistant education. Occupational therapy assistant educational programs meet standards of performance established by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) to produce competent entry-level occupational therapy assistants who are eligible for national certification and state licensure. Occupational therapy assistants work collaboratively with occupational therapists in contributing to the profession's pursuit of providing high-quality, cost-effective services to promote health and wellness by meeting society's occupational needs. Occupational therapy assistant education provides a sound foundation for practice with the development of competent skill sets to fulfill various professional roles within contemporary practice. These roles include direct care provider, educator, manager, leader, and advocate for the profession and the consumer (ACOTE, 2018).

Professional development

[Examining intraprofessional competencies for occupational therapist and occupational therapy assistant collaboration](#)

Abstract only*

Source: Occupational Therapy in Health Care 32(1-4)

Publication date: October 2018

This study examined competencies perceived by occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants as important for intraprofessional collaboration. While interprofessional practice is well defined, less is known about collaboration within professions with varied levels of practice credentials. Occupational therapy practitioners (N = 351) rated 20 competencies in four domains (Intraprofessional Teamwork, Roles/Responsibilities, Communication, and Values/Ethics) through an online survey. A

high percentage of respondents perceived all competencies as important or very important. There were significant differences between occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants in ratings of five competencies, including: seeking information/support from the team partner, flexibility for effective partnership, engagement in professional development for collaboration, communicating ideas, and providing feedback about performance. Outcomes contribute to understanding intraprofessional collaboration for occupational therapy practice. Competencies can serve as guidelines for education and professional development.

Workforce planning

[Understanding the role of allied health professional support workers with exercise qualifications in the delivery of the NHS Long Term Plan within allied health professional services in England](#)

Source: BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine

Publication date: 2023

Demand modelling for the allied health professionals (AHPs) workforce showed that significant expansion would be needed to successfully deliver on the National Health Service (NHS) Long Term Plan. The aim was to explore the use of AHP support workers with exercise qualifications in AHP services and to understand their current and potential role in NHS commissioned AHP services in England. The project had two phases and took place between October 2020 and January 2021. In phase one, an electronic survey was carried out to identify the scope and variation of exercise professionals working in AHP support roles in NHS commissioned services. Semistructured interviews were conducted in phase two to gain further understanding about the experiences of those involved in AHP commissioned services. Survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics and interview data were qualitatively analysed using thematic

analysis. Recorded interviews were transcribed and initially coded. Coding was then refined and themes were identified. Support workers with exercise qualifications made a valued contribution to AHP services and were considered cost-effective in delivering a specialised exercise intervention. AHP support workers contributed to a range of tasks relating to clinical exercise prescription. Collated data highlighted inconsistency in the way AHP support workers with exercise qualifications identified themselves, despite similar roles. Variation existed in the level of autonomy for AHP support workers with exercise qualifications, even within the same NHS Agenda for Change band. Attempts to manage this disparity involved numerous governance processes to ensure safe, high-quality healthcare in the context of delegation to support workers. Limited training and development opportunities and the lack of career progression for support workers were consistently acknowledged as a source of frustration and hindrance to individuals fulfilling their potential. AHP support workers with exercise qualifications have potential to positively impact service delivery providing added value to the NHS workforce.

[Assistant radiographer practitioners: Creating capacity or challenging professional boundaries?](#) Abstract only*

Source: Radiography

Publication date: 2018

Introduction: Over the last 2 decades the assistant radiographer practitioner (ARP) role has been introduced into NHS diagnostic imaging departments as a strategy to expand the workforce and create capacity. This skill mix initiative has not been implemented in a standardised way and there is limited knowledge of the current role scope within general radiography (X-Ray).

Conclusion: ARPs are helping to maintain capacity in imaging departments but we suggest there is further scope for expansion. The practice described by the post holders suggests that many

are working beyond the scope envisaged by the radiography professional body.

Competency Frameworks

General AHP Support Workers

[AHP Support Worker Competency, Education and Career Development Framework](#) Health Education England

This framework enables employers, networks, integrated care systems (ICSs) and services effectively plan, develop, and deploy their AHP support workforce. It provides guidance on training, education and competencies for AHP support workers and demonstrates a clear pathway for recruitment and progression, with common and transferrable skills across eight domains.

[AHP support workforce – understanding education, qualifications and development](#) Health Education England

This guide provides a brief overview of the formal education and development opportunities that assist support worker learning, including Functional Skills and Technical levels (T levels). It is one of several associated Guides that HEE has published to support the AHP Support Worker Competency, Education and Career Development Framework. The Framework is one element of HEE's AHP workforce strategy, which aims to build capacity and capability across the professions and secure the future workforce nationally, regionally and locally.

[AHP Support Worker – new checklists published](#) 2023, Skills for Health

All the providers awarded have mapped the duties of the apprenticeship standards to the 8 domains of the [AHP Support Worker Competency, Education and Career Development](#)

[Framework](#). To ensure that the apprenticeships are contextualised to meet the requirements of the AHP workforce. To further support the implementation of this programme we have published the following checklists aimed at employers and prospective apprentices:

AHP Support Worker Apprenticeships: [Employer Checklist](#)

AHP Support Worker Apprenticeships: [Learner Checklist](#)

[Development of a digital competency framework for UK Allied Health Professionals](#)

Health Education England, 2020

This framework has been developed to support the enhancement of digital competence (knowledge and skills associated with digital technology in practice) for all allied health professions from band 3 to band 9. It is intended to be a developmental and supportive tool that can enable all staff to meet their digital potential.

Physiotherapy

[Optimising capability in the physiotherapy support workforce](#)

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, Reviewed February 2020

This resource aims to assist all CSP members and other stakeholders to understand the different levels of physiotherapy support worker practice. It outlines how support workers might achieve the full capabilities necessary to work at a variety of practice levels and progress in their careers. It also serves as a framework to guide the development of support worker roles. The guideline is divided into three sections, all of which cover different aspects.

Radiotherapy

[Education and Career Framework for the Radiography Workforce \(4th edition\)](#)

The College of Radiographers, 2022

Through innovation and extending scopes of practice, new and emerging roles seek to improve patient outcomes and service delivery models. It is therefore very timely and necessary for the CoR to review and update the ECF to be supportive of the education and training of the entire radiography workforce, empowering them to meet both the current and future healthcare needs of the population.

This framework is therefore patient centric and for use by all members of the radiography workforce from across the four nations of the UK, including those involved in managing the workforce and developing new roles, in education and training, and research. The ECF is also an information resource for those considering a career in radiography, current learners, and members of the public.

Speech and Language Therapy

[Support worker framework](#)

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, Updated June 2023

The RCSLT with funding from Health Education England (HEE, now NHS England), has developed a support worker framework to support the professional training and development of support workers in speech and language therapy. Our page on [equality, diversity and inclusion in the support workforce](#) should be referred to, alongside the framework. It builds upon the work of NHS England (previously Health Education England) and NHS Scotland in developing generic learning frameworks for those working in a healthcare support worker role.

*Help accessing articles or papers

Where a report/ journal article or resource is freely available the link has been provided. If an NHS OpenAthens account is required this has been indicated. It has also been highlighted if only the abstract is available. If you do not have an OpenAthens account you can [self-register here](#).

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