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NEARLY RECESSION-PROOF PROFESSION CELEBRATES NATIONAL AWARENESS MONTH

Occupational Therapy Helps People of All Ages Live Life To Its Fullest

Bethesda, MD — The numbers don't lie. Demand for occupational therapy services is on the rise and new practitioners are needed to fill that demand. The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) is using National Occupational Therapy Month 2010 (April) as an opportunity to highlight the profession as one to promote from the rooftops as a vital and satisfying career choice that helps individuals of all ages live life to its fullest.

"I am proud to be an occupational therapy practitioner for so many reasons," said Penelope Moyers Cleveland, Ph.D., OTR/L, FAOTA, president of AOTA. "For starters, occupational therapy considers the needs of the whole person by addressing people's psychological and emotional well-being, as well as their physical needs. And of course, I am incredibly lucky to have a career that continues to see growth in so many areas of practice."

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of occupational therapy practitioners is expected to increase by 26 percent between 2008 and 2018, much faster than the average for all occupations. The BLS also noted that median annual wages of occupational therapists were \$66,780 in May 2008; occupational therapist assistants earned \$48,230.

Occupational therapy enables people of all ages live life to its fullest by enabling them to promote health, make lifestyle or environmental changes, and prevent—or live better with—injury, illness or disability. By looking at the whole picture—a client's psychological, physical, emotional, and social make-up—occupational therapy assists people to achieve their goals, function at the highest possible level, maintain or rebuild their independence and participate in the everyday activities of life.

As part of the profession's journey toward its centennial in 2017, AOTA identified six overarching areas of practice—children & youth; health & wellness; mental health; productive aging; rehabilitation, disability & participation; and work & industry.

Children & Youth

Pediatric occupational therapy professionals provide service to infants, toddlers, children, and youth and their families in a variety of settings including schools, clinics, hospitals, and homes. Under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) regulations, occupational therapy practitioners also participate in broad new initiatives such as early intervening services and response-to-intervention to promote optimum learning.

Pediatric occupational therapy practitioners provide support to families and collaborate with other disciplines such as special educators, teachers, and medical personnel.

Health & Wellness

Health promotion is a prevention strategy that allows people to manage and improve their overall health status. Occupational therapy practitioners play an important role in achieving this. Their unique perspective helps clients adapt and organize their daily occupations or activities related to self-care,

home management, community participation, education, work and/or leisure into daily routines to prevent and minimize dysfunction, promote and develop a healthy lifestyle, and facilitate adaptation and recovery from injury, disease, or developmental challenges.

Mental Health

The World Health Organization has identified mental illness as a growing cause of disability worldwide and predicts that, in the future, mental illness—specifically depression—will be the top cause of disability. Occupational therapy brings a collaborative rehabilitation approach to mental health treatment in keeping with the recent trend toward increased emphasis on recovery and functionality.

Productive Aging

Our society's rapidly aging population, increased longevity, the changing world of work, and baby boomers' focus on quality-of-life issues are just some of the factors that will increase the need for occupational therapy services in this area. Productive aging involves care of self and others, management of home, engagement in leisure and physical activities, civic engagement, and social interaction which can involve travel, entertaining, and visiting with friends.

Rehabilitation, Disability & Participation

Rehabilitation is at the core of occupational therapy and addresses the needs of persons with injuries, illnesses, or deficits in occupational performance due to other causes. Occupational therapy services are provided in outpatient clinics or private practices; inpatient acute care or rehabilitation units of hospitals; skilled nursing and assisted living facilities; and home or other community-based venues.

Interventions address a broad variety of diagnoses such as orthopedic injuries, neurological or cardiopulmonary disease, spinal cord and other trauma, chronic conditions (e.g., rheumatoid arthritis), low vision, and driver rehabilitation.

Work & Industry

Occupational therapy practitioners perform ergonomic analysis, fit-for-duty programs and injury prevention and training that keep workers on the job, reduce costs, and improve productivity.

"We are compassionate, resourceful, creative, motivated, want meaning in life, enjoy science and the arts, are good communicators and listeners, and have a knack for problem solving," said Moyers Cleveland. "I am a proud champion for the profession year-round, but Occupational Therapy Month in April is a wonderful reason for all practitioners to tell the world who they are and what they do."

Founded in 1917, the **American Occupational Therapy Association** (AOTA) represents the professional interests and concerns of more than 140,000 occupational therapists, assistants and students nationwide. The Association educates the public and advances the profession of occupational therapy by providing resources, setting standards including accreditations and serving as an advocate to improve health care. Based in Bethesda, Md., AOTA's major programs and activities are directed toward promoting the professional development of its members and assuring consumer access to quality services so patients can maximize their individual potential. For more information, go to www.aota.org.