

Guest Editorial

The Future of Occupational Therapy in Rehabilitation Sciences: Global Impact

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It was said once that occupational therapy (OT) is the treatment of the mind, body and spirit. OT is a humanistic and a health specialty that aims to enhance a person's ability and improve functional performance in terms of independence, safety and quality in the various functions and activities of daily life of value and meaning to individuals and groups. The occupational therapist supports motor, mental and social skills and helps create a better place for functional participation in society. Scientific research has proven that OT services are effective and successful, and that the inclusion of an occupational therapist in the multidisciplinary medical rehabilitation team improves the integrated planning of treatment for persons with disabilities and injuries of all kinds and for different age groups.

OT has been integrated into interdisciplinary rehabilitation and tele-rehabilitation services and proved to be useful and effective. The World Health Organization (WHO) includes the OT as an integral part of the holistic team of healthcare thus to promote quality care and outcomes. Occupational therapists provide a variety of preventive and therapeutic services and serve diverse population and diagnoses, such as but not limited to mental health, psychiatric and psychosocial conditions (i.e., depression, anxiety), pediatric and developmental conditions (i.e., developmental delays, autism), geriatric conditions (i.e., dementia Alzheimer type), neurological conditions (i.e., stroke, spinal cord injuries, hand injuries), physical conditions (i.e., burns, fractures), and any other current and/or emerging conditions that lead to poor functional performance and negative psychological effects for individuals, such as COVID-19 pandemic. Occupational therapists can also work at different places, including hospitals, medical and community rehabilitation centers, mental health, educational and scientific research institutions, schools, nursing homes for the elderly, and home care. The 2020 report of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) estimates that there are more than 580,000 occupational therapist in more than 95 countries around the world and the OT profession has grown in the past 50 years with significantly increasing demand for this important healthcare profession.

OT is now over 100-years old. However, public awareness about OT is relatively low indicating a gap in how they understand OT and a need for the inclusion of OT in the medical and health sciences clinical programs and educational curricula. A recent study indicated that health care professionals have poor knowledge about OT (49.35%) with the highest percentage of knowledge about OT in physicians (51.97%). Another study reported that only (59.1%) have heard of OT, (67.3%) were not satisfied about their knowledge in OT, and (89.8%) showed interest to be educated about OT. Launching outreach campaigns and conducting educational programs among healthcare professionals and public to raise awareness and enhance understanding of the OT profession is crucial.

21st Century is a Century of Occupational Therapy!

The job outlook for OT is bright and promising! The most recent earnings information for OT indicated that occupational therapists' salary was ranked number 9 in the best healthcare jobs and the salary outlook has been increasing for decades. Employment of occupational therapists is projected to grow 24% from 2016 to 2026, much faster than the average for all occupations. Nowadays, OT is a growing healthcare profession and by the time OT students graduate, OT professionals will probably be working in even more places.

Call to Action!

Our call to action is for all OT practitioners and students in the world, as the best ambassadors for supporting our profession by promoting the unique value and role of OT and enhancing communities awareness of our great profession. Public awareness campaigns are recommended and should be considered to help create accurate and powerful images for the development of the OT profession worldwide.