LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Title and Role Changes for Certified Occupational Therapy Assistants Require Redefinition by AOTA and States

I believe that I understood E. Nelson Clark's (1993) guest editorial suggesting that experienced certified occupational therapy assistants should be permitted to work without supervision from a registered occupational therapist in mental health settings. I agree with Allen's (1993) response to this editorial, in which she pointed out professional responsibilities in mental health settings that she believed were not intended for the role of certified occupational therapy assistant.

I realize that Clark's main point was not to recommend a title change; however, I thought he was saying that certified occupational therapy assistants are already "certified occupational therapists" (1993, p. 4). I believe that Clark's reference to certified occupational therapy assistants as "certified occupational therapists" gave many certified occupational therapy assistants the feeling that if someone in Clark's position referred to them as "certified occupational therapists," then they should have the title of therapist. In the summary of a title survey on certified occupational therapy assistants, Brown stated that reader response to Clark's editorial prompted the survey and stated, "The article suggested that the COTA title be changed to COT (certified occupational therapist) and that COTs be allowed to practice without supervision in mental health settings" (1994, p. 5). To my knowledge, Clark did not notify the readers of his 1993 editorial that he thought the title should not be changed to include the word therapist, even though letters continued to be written in favor of the title that he used in reference to certified occupational therapy assistants.

My statement that appropriate titles have not been suggested was based on rejections of previous suggested titles. In 1970, resolution 250-70 to change the certified occupational therapy assistant title to Certified Occupational Therapy Technician was defeated in the Delegate Assembly (AOTA, 1970). In 1978, Resolution I to change the title to Certified Occupational Therapy Associate was defeated by the Representative Assembly (AOTA, 1978). Also in 1978, resolution H to change the title to Certified Functional Therapy Assistant was defeated by the Representative Assembly (AOTA, 1978).

In 1988, Terry Brittell, Chairperson of the COTA Advisory Committee, urged putting closure on the title change issue. He believed that the problems surrounding the issue were more related to supervision, image, and recognition. He asked certified occupational therapy assistants how they saw themselves. He recommended that, rather than debating a name change, certified occupational therapy assistants invest the energy to market themselves, stating "it is our responsibility to market COTA services, not the profession nor the COT's. If you don't want to feel you are a victim, then become a leader and start to do something more proactive and less reactive. There are so many areas that need attention. Why get hung up on a name change?" (Brettell, p. 4).

Brown's survey results showed that 342 of 368 respondents (as Clark stated, more than 90%) believe the word assistant should be dropped from the title. Of the estimated 12,000 certified occupational therapy assistants in the United States, 5,747 are members of AOTA (t. Silverlight, personal communication, September 1994). Although 342 is an excellent sample for the survey, it would be interesting to know how the other 11,652 certified occupational therapy assistants feel about their title.

My "Issue is" article (Hirama, 1994) was certainly not intended to "alarm" or "misguide" anyone. I apologize if I "alarmed" the "occupational therapy community," as Clark stated that I did. I simply believe that we must take responsibility for meeting current minimum standards for educational requirements in our profession and follow the current standards of practice, the code of ethics of the profession, and all laws that regulate practice. Any change in supervision for certified occupational therapy assistants will need to be redefined by AOTA guidelines and by state regulations. It would seem that any title changes as well as role changes would need to involve AOTA, the state regulatory boards, and the American Occupational Therapy Certification Board.

References
Clark, E. N. (September 6, 1993). Are we forgetting we have COTA? ADVANCE for Occupational Therapists, 9, 4.

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Correction
To "A Room Temperature Vulcanizing Silicone Rubber Spurt Splint," by Mario Francisco Camelio and Allison Joy Karus (March 1995, pp. 244-249):
Due to a printer's error on p. 247, the photograph intended as Figure 3 was placed above the caption for Figure 5, and the photograph intended as Figure 5 was placed above the caption for Figure 3. On behalf of the printer, AJOT editorial staff members apologize for the error and hope that readers were not inconvenienced.