Negative Images in Psychosocial Occupational Therapy

On behalf of the Wisconsin Mental Health Task Force, I am writing to express the mixed emotional reaction experienced when reading the article "New Pathways for Psychosocial Occupational Therapists" by Sally Price (AJOT, June 1993, pp. 557-559). We were excited to see an article that seemed to address the same issues that caused the development of our task force, but as those in attendance read on, we were dismayed by yet another list of negative images projected onto those of us in psychosocial practice. How disheartening it is to see the studies that seem to indicate that the stigma of mental illness extends to those who work with the mentally ill.

Therapists who represent areas of practice in inpatient settings, day treatment, community support, and education were present at the meeting and all expressed a more positive image of the psychiatric field than this article would indicate is possible. It is grossly apparent that those of us with the opportunity to practice in an exciting and meaningful way with persons with mental illness must provide positive fieldwork experiences to students, or at the very least, we must try to incorporate some of Mike Lyons and Robyn Hayes’ recommendations to provide guided positive contact (see “Student Perceptions of Persons With Psychiatric and Other Disorders,” AJOT, June 1993, pp. 541-548). In Wisconsin we have a treatment decline in therapists and in fieldwork experiences in psychosocial treatment settings. On the other hand, new areas of service provision in partial hospitalization programs and in community outreach are a reality here. The positive aspect of Price’s article is the list of solutions. This letter is also to acknowledge that as a task force we are attempting to implement the fight for reimbursement and promote opportunities for employment in the psychosocial field. We look forward to more articles that address these concerns.

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Author’s Response

I regret it if my article seemed to indicate that nothing positive was happening in the practice of psychosocial occupational therapy, because I certainly do not feel that way. The first part, a review of literature, was aimed at giving others’ views about why our profession is experiencing a decline of occupational therapists practicing in the mental health field. My main purpose was to focus on the many positive and exciting moves psychosocial occupational therapists are making into new areas of treatment, particularly in community outreach, as is happening in your state.

Sally Price, MS, OTR
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Special Issue on Feminism Stimulates Wide Discussion

I want to applaud the special issue on feminism published in November 1992. This was the most exciting issue of AJOT in recent years and the only one I can remember that was so enthusiastically received. I think the best tribute to this issue is the amount of discussion it has generated. Shortly after this issue was published, we at Eastern Michigan University were celebrating our 50th Anniversary. During this event I had the chance to talk with many of our alumni who were discussing the various articles with great interest. It is not often that a whole group of diverse occupational therapists comes together and talks about a complete issue of AJOT.

Through my readings in feminist research and literature, I have noted many similarities between occupational therapy and feminist philosophy. I believe we as a profession have much to gain by reading feminist thought and applying the concepts both clinically and academically. In a predominantly female profession such as ours, it would be naïve to believe that this does not affect our status and pay in the health care industry.

I urge my colleagues to continue to explore this area of feminist study. Again, my appreciation to AJOT and the special issue editors who took the first step in exploring feminism in occupational therapy.

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