LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Spirituality Issue Provides Needed Voice

I was very excited by the special issue on spirituality in occupational therapy (AJOT, March 1997). Being a Christian myself, I believe that the therapist’s ability to connect with the client on a spiritual level is important. Howard and Howard’s article, “Occupation as Spiritual Activity,” pointed out that occupational therapy’s goal of using purposeful activity to bring meaning to treatment complements the thought that spirituality is the filter for choosing life’s meaningful activities. I applaud the authors of this article for providing a voice to therapists who understand that some clients need to integrate their beliefs into all aspects of their life, even treatment. I believe spirituality is the hidden factor in the more politically correct phenomenon of wellness and should be further addressed at the national level. My hope is that we continue to discuss those topics that provide meaning to clients even if the topics are controversial or unpopular.

Andra P. Henning, OTS
Laurel, Maryland

Impact of Promotion of Occupational Therapy Campaign

When I was an occupational therapy intern in the spring of 1983, as my "project," I worked on having the governor of South Carolina issue a proclamation declaring a certain week that spring as "OT Week." I remember that one of the primary nonpatient care concerns of AOTA at that time was promoting occupational therapy and what we do.

My purpose for writing this letter is to let all of you know how well you (we) have achieved our goal. After practicing medicine in the Army for several years as a flight surgeon, I decided to pursue a civilian residency in occupational medicine. As I enter the final year of that, I find myself repeatedly having to define what occupational medicine is not only to patients and the general public, but also to allied health professionals and even other physicians. The most frequently asked question I received from EVERYONE is, “Is that like occupational therapy?”

It would appear that AOTA has done its job well!

Kelly A. Supple, OTR, MD, MPH
Salt Lake City, Utah

Professional Values: Diversity Versus Disintegration

Currently, much discussion has centered around the disagreements between our professional association (American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.) and our national certification board (National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy). However, this is not the only controversy threatening to split the profession. Some theoretical proponents of our profession have recently been heard in public forums (e.g., workshops, conferences) to express their disrespect for one another or for another’s theories in shockingly unkind terms.

Those of us who are teaching occupational therapy theory to students are probably more aware than most of this jockeying for influence. Granted, there are theoretical disagreements in every profession. A certain amount of public debate between schools of thought is expected—even healthy. However, when the conflicts begin to distress students to the point of rethinking their professional choice, as has occurred in our educational program, this becomes a problem for the profession as a whole.

Many current practitioners went into occupational therapy because of its diversity. Our profession provides services to all conceivable age groups and cultures with a wide range of physical and mental disabilities, in settings both public and private, almost anywhere in the world. The multiple theoretical approaches available to us are as diverse and engaging as the populations we serve. Yet, how can we celebrate this diversity when our leaders are trying to convince select groups, whether in classrooms, workshops, or national conferences, that theirs is the only “right” theory, paradigm, or model of practice?

There are many right ways to think about therapy and to reason clinically. Respectful disagreement will always be a strength. But while self-serving degradation of the opponent seems to be the standard in politics, let us not let it be the standard in our profession. Public statements of disrespect are a disgrace and embarrassment and can only hurt the cause of our profession as it enters an ever-more competitive health care marketplace. It will affect more than the public image of occupational therapy. It will affect the dedication of our students and the self-esteem of our practitioners.

Occupational therapy is blessed with a growing number of highly creative theorists and researchers, all of whom have much to contribute to the profession. Who listen to their presentations, attend their workshops, use their principles and methods in our practice, and teach their theories to students would only ask this: that you listen to and consider one another’s ideas, look for commonalities as well as differences, and transcend your negative opinions and aspirations of influence long enough to put occupational therapy first.

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The American Journal of Occupational Therapy welcomes letters to the editor. If you have a comment about or reaction to something that has appeared in the journal or about an issue that affects us or the profession, let us know your views. Type the letter double spaced and forward it to Elaine Vistelar, Editor.