SOFTWARE & TECHNOLOGY REVIEWS

Changes and Stages: An Editorial

In the early 1980s, the computer age for occupational therapy practice was just beginning, but there was no effective vehicle for the transferring of information among therapists concerned with current computer software. Software to be used in occupational therapy evaluation, treatment, or administrative duties was bought solely on the advice of manufacturers and their advertisements. Seeing the need for peer consultation, the Steering Committee for Computers and Technology in Occupational Therapy, the resource personnel listed in the Computer Information Packet, and the practice department of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) developed the Software Review Guidelines in April 1986. Carol Gwin, a leader in technology use, became the first editor of the Software Reviews department. The first publication of software reviews appeared in the April 1987 issue of the American Journal of Occupational Therapy (AJOT).

On July 1988, Richard K. Schwartz, one of the first contributors to the Software Reviews department, became the contributing editor. He saw the need to expand the scope of reviews to include technological devices, and in December 1988 the column became known as Software and Technology Reviews. During Schwartz’s editorship, approximately one of every three reviews published was on a technological device. This ratio as well as the expansion in use of technological devices such as work simulators, adapted keyboards, and seating systems in occupational therapy settings justified and confirmed his foresight.

As the current contributing editor to this department, I would like to commend and thank Carol Gwin and Richard K. Schwartz for their efforts in developing and maintaining the Software and Technology Reviews section in AJOT. Their efforts have helped to dispel the fear of technology from our profession and assisted in integrating technology into our daily practice.

Software and technology reviews in the past have been needed to fulfill the developing use of technology in the profession of occupational therapy. The current need for reviews is for those therapists who are looking to expand their use of software and technology in their current practice or to make appropriate recommendations to their clients. Occupational therapists with varying degrees of expertise, from novice to developer, can be found within our profession. Reviews are needed for this full range of expertise and for the various technology use areas. These areas include, but are not limited to, cognition, perception, ergonomics, safety, leisure, vocational tasks, and accessibility. A technological device is only a tool that has not yet obtained common acceptance and use.

With the developing interest in technology within the profession and the almost commonplace use of software and technological devices in the community, the need for objective reviews has increased exponentially. Yet for some reason, the number of software and technology reviews has decreased to the point where there were only seven reviews published in 1991. With your help, I hope we can reverse this trend and once again publish this column at least every other month.

When I accepted the position of contributing editor, I noted some areas of concern that may have had an effect on the number of software and technology reviews previously submitted. First, the Software Review Guidelines had not been updated since 1986. Second, there were no guidelines for reviewing technological devices. A revised version of the Software and Technology Reviews Guidelines was drafted and reviewed by the previous editors and the Standing Committee for the Technology Special Interest Section. From their comments, a new form was developed. At the AOTA national conference in Houston, over 250 copies of the new guidelines were distributed. If only 20% of those therapists who took a copy of the Software and Technology Reviews Guidelines would submit one publishable review, the current number of reviews from this column would be doubled.

My other area of concern is the possible lack of self-advocacy to the manufacturers. They may not know of the expertise we occupational therapists possess or the marketing effect of a review in AJOT.

If you use software or technology in your work, please consider reviewing the items you have. Remember, technology is not limited by electronics or sophistication. Some purely mechanical devices like the WorkMod™ reviewed in this issue are appropriate items for review. There are no barriers or limits on the cost, size, or usefulness of the products for review. Some of the best reviews may be for public domain software or items that did not live up to your expectations. The only limitations on this column are on promoting a piece of software or technological device for which the reviewer has a financial interest or a review that does not have an occupational therapy correlation.

To maintain a consistent format, the AJOT Software and Technology Reviews Guidelines will be used. These guidelines will be mailed to you on request. The contributing editor and other therapists with expertise in a topic area will read all relevant reviews for clarity, accuracy, and usefulness to the profession. Questions, comments, and letters to the editor are encouraged and will be printed in part or full on a space-available basis.

Lawrence Faulkner, MSc, OTR
Contributing Editor

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