The Wilma L. West Library Goes On-Line

In a previous article, I discussed plans to create a bibliographic database that would include the Wilma L. West (WLW) Library's entire collection (Binderman, 1987). That plan is now a reality. OT BibSys is one of several files that constitute OT SOURCE, an electronic information system produced and maintained by the joint support of the American Occupational Therapy Foundation (AOTF) and the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA).

OT BibSys is mounted on an Alpha Micro Supermicro computer. STAR, the database management system being used, is flexible enough to accommodate the various types of materials to be included in OT BibSys (i.e., books, proceedings, unpublished reports, journal articles). STAR permits multiple access to the records and the use of menus or macros for user-friendly operation.

Weiskel (1988), in his article "The Electronic Library," discussed how changes in the storage, transmission, and use of information will affect students, scholars, and researchers. Although Weiskel discussed changes in the context of large research libraries, his points are valid for the smaller academic campuses. At these smaller institutions, multiple files, which are being mounted on in-house computers, can be accessed through personal computers or terminals scattered around the campus. Much, if not all, of the preliminary gathering, synthesizing, and analyzing of information will be done by researchers at "scholar's workstations" (Weiskel, p. 42). Actual visits to the library will be rare.

For AOTA members, access to the information stored in the WLW Library has been limited by members' distance from the library, limited library hours, inconsistent cataloging of the material, and the lack of uniform organization of the occupational therapy literature. OT BibSys, however, will help to overcome these limitations.

Through the use of compatible personal computers, modems, and communication software, AOTA members can access OT BibSys 24 hours a day, 7 days a week from their offices, clinics, and homes. After completing a search on their personal computers, users can download and manipulate the list of relevant references.

The problem of inconsistent cataloging or indexing of the library's collection has been resolved through the availability of a newly revised thesaurus.

The relevancy and specificity of subject headings determine how easy it will be for the user to search the literature as well as how successful he or she will be in retrieving relevant citations. This is particularly true for occupational therapy literature (Lansing & Edmondson, 1987; Reed, 1988). Although the two most popular indexing services, Index Medicus and Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health, have in their respective thesauri, increased the number of subject headings related to rehabilitation, few of these added terms are specific to occupational therapy. An additional problem that Reed discusses is the indexers' and abstractors' misunderstanding of the definition of occupational therapy. All the literature included in OT BibSys will be indexed according to the Thesaurus of Occupational Therapy Subject Headings, which was developed by AOTA's Thesaurus Committee; thus the inconsistencies in subject headings previously used for the various types of publications in the WLW Library will be eliminated. These subject headings will be listed alphabetically in one section of the thesaurus and arranged in a hierarchical classification system in a second section. The arrangement is similar to that used by Index Medicus and Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health.

The occupational therapy thesaurus will be available to all subscribers to OT BibSys. By selecting the appropriate terms from the thesaurus before accessing the database, the user can search the literature more efficiently and eliminate irrelevant citations. The thesaurus will be updated regularly; terms will be added and deleted, as the practice and profession of occupational therapy demand.

The primary reasons for AOTA's creation of OT BibSys were to organize the occupational therapy literature and to provide AOTA's members with easy access to this literature. It can be difficult to locate and retrieve occupational therapy literature; however, it is not impossible, as Reed (1988) proved with the almost 7,000 articles that she identified for her study. Johnson and Leising (1986) completed an analysis of the references cited in feature articles published in the American Journal of Occupational Therapy for the years 1978, 1980, and 1982. One of their

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findings was that the “body of literature potentially relevant to the work of occupational therapy is very large, covering many disciplines” (p. 390). That occupational therapy is a multidisciplinary profession is not news to any occupational therapist, nor is the multidisciplinary nature unique to this profession (Bottom, 1988; Weiskel, 1988). However, because of the multidisciplinary nature of their profession, occupational therapists must search all the pertinent on-line databases or printed indexes and abstracts to locate published material or accept the risk of (a) missing information potentially helpful to a client and (b) of repeating someone else’s research (Reed).

Except for the two cumulative indexes to the American Journal of Occupational Therapy, “[AOTA] has not attempted to organize its literature since the late 1930s” (Reed, 1988, p. 123). It is obvious that this literature, which spans so many disciplines, must be brought together. OT BibSys is the first step in the plan to accomplish this. In this first phase, the file will include all the books, proceedings, published and unpublished reports, dissertations, and theses in the WLW Library as well as the articles from the American Journal of Occupational Therapy (1947–), Occupational Therapy Journal of Research (1980–), Archives of Occupational Therapy/Occupational Therapy and Rehabilitation (1922–1944), OT Newspaper/OT News (1958–), and the SIS newsletters (1978–). During the second phase, articles from other occupational therapy journals will be added. In the final phase, articles, books, and chapters from non-occupational therapy literature will be reviewed, and those written by occupational therapists or specifically dealing with occupational therapy will be considered for inclusion in OT BibSys. Once the file is created, our primary objective will be to keep it current by adding new literature as soon as it comes into the library.

We hope that by gathering and organizing this vast amount of material into one database we will make it more easily accessible to clinicians, students, and researchers. The problems discussed in Reed’s (1988) and Johnson and Leising’s (1986) papers will be solved. Occupational therapists will have access not only to information available in AOTA’s and AOTF’s books, reports, and serial publications, but also to other occupational therapy sources and to relevant publications in other fields. (Reed identified 1,524 articles in the latter category.) The information will be current as well as historical. (Johnson & Leising were concerned by their finding that the occupational therapists publishing in the American Journal of Occupational Therapy were relying heavily on older material.)

In spite of our best efforts to expand OT BibSys coverage, it may be impossible to capture in one file all the publications pertinent to such an eclectic and dynamic profession. Nevertheless, OT BibSys will be a powerful tool for managing the occupational therapy literature.

References


