The Occupational Therapy Library: Past, Present, and Future

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For many years before the Occupational Therapy Library came into existence, members of the profession were involved in its creation by gathering records, books, and journals that would provide it a solid foundation. Finally in 1980, with the association’s purchase of its headquarters, space to house this collection of donated material was made available.

"As part of its education and research functions, the Foundation undertook responsibility for administering and financing the Association’s Library” (Reed, 1983, p. 412). In October 1980, a part-time librarian was hired. The books, journals, pamphlets, and other materials were organized, catalogued, and indexed. By making the information in these printed works accessible, a depository center was transformed into a resource center.

The story of the library’s inception and development was told in two articles in the American Journal of Occupational Therapy published in October 1981 (Occupational Therapy Library) and in June 1983 (Reed). As reported in these articles, the collection comprised 1,700 items in 1981 and 2,700 items in 1983. Currently, the collection contains 3,000 books, 271 bound and unbound journal volumes, and 258 dissertations or theses.

In her 1983 article, Reed listed four purposes to be accomplished with the Occupational Therapy Library:

1. To document the roots of the occupational therapy profession
2. To act as a primary deposit and retrieval system for published and unpublished materials on occupational therapy practice, education, and research
3. To provide access to published and unpublished materials on the profession of occupational therapy for scholars, practitioners, and researchers
4. To organize occupational therapy materials into better retrieval systems than exist in normal library services

These purposes remain valid, and mechanisms to accomplish them are either in place or being planned.

The Association’s early records, reports, and photographs have been organized and are being preserved at the Moody Medical Library in Galveston, Texas. A catalog of these holdings will be published.

Complete sets of the key journals in the profession such as Occupational Therapy and Rehabilitation, American Journal of Occupational Therapy, and Occupational Therapy Journal of Research are in the library. The library is collecting theses and dissertations, as well as books, articles, journals, and other material from members of the profession and from publishers.

The librarian is available to assist in retrieving information by providing literature searches (manual or computerized), factua information, citation verification, interlibrary loans, and photoduplication. These services may be requested by AOTA members in person, by mail, or by phone. Members may use the new 800 number to speak with the librarian. The number is 800-654-5584 in Maryland and 800-THE-AOTA (800-843-2682) in all other states.

In addition to making the information in the library’s collection more easily accessible, the library is trying to increase the available information by subscribing to three vendors of bibliographic data bases. This information can be retrieved on request for a fee.

The librarian participates in local and regional consortia and networks because they provide added means to promote the Occupational Therapy Library and the occupational therapy profession, as well as to expand the pool of information from which we may draw.

In 1985 a comprehensive draft of the thesaurus for occupational therapy subject headings was developed to permit more accurate and in-depth indexing of the occupational therapy literature. AOTA and AOTF are hoping that as a result of the existence of this comprehensive occupational therapy thesaurus more terms specific to occupational therapy will be added to the thesaurus that are used to search other indices or data bases. Progress in this endeavor will be reported periodically.

The thesaurus will be used to index the material to be included in the computerized bibliographic system that AOTA is planning to create in the next year. The library’s periodical and book collection will be incorporated into this system. Members will be able to search the library’s holdings by using a personal computer and a modem. Such a bibliographic system will be an invaluable and powerful tool for students, practitioners, and researchers.

The Occupational Therapy Li-
The library's collection and services have grown substantially and improved over the last 6 years. To ensure that the library continues to meet the purposes outlined in Reed's article, we need to consider the following:

Larger quarters are needed to permit the book and journal collections to be housed together and to provide more seating space for library users. Plans to move the library have been approved.

To date, the library has relied greatly on donations from occupational therapy professionals and publishers. A formal acquisition and collection development policy is needed to assist the librarian in selecting and acquiring material that meets the information needs of the occupational therapy profession and in excluding the donated material that is not within the scope of the library's collection.

The continued intellectual and material support of the Occupational Therapy Library by the members of the profession is both necessary and greatly appreciated.

The Occupational Therapy Library is a powerful resource to the profession. Its ability to meet the information needs of the various categories of its users in a timely, cost-efficient manner continues to be its primary objective.

References