LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Clarifies Figures From Manpower Commission

In her recent article on occupational therapy in mental health (August 1987 issue, p. 495) Dr. Bonder reported that "the number of occupational therapists in community mental health centers was reduced by half" between 1977 and 1982. Her source for this statement supposedly was the report published by the AOTA Ad Hoc Commission on Occupational Therapy Manpower, Occupational Therapy Manpower: A Plan for Progress (1985). Fortunately this is not what the commission said (I was a member of that commission), nor does it describe the true situation at community mental health centers.

The Manpower Commission's report did state that between 1977 and 1982, the proportion of OTRs employed in community mental health centers dropped from 4.3% to 2.4%. Although the percent fell by half, the increasing number of occupational therapy personnel in the work force mitigated the effect. This is shown in the table below.

Between 1977 and 1982, the estimated number of OTRs in community mental health settings was reduced by only 8.2%, not by half. During the same period, the estimated number of COTAs in community mental health settings rose by almost half (49.1%).

If one looks at more recent data using updated figures from the 1986 AOTA Member Data Survey, the estimated number of OTRs in community mental health settings fell 21.8% between 1977 and 1986 whereas the numbers of COTAs rose 121.4%.

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Author's Reply

I appreciate Mr Silvergleit's clarification and update of the employment figures for occupational therapists in community mental health centers. In fact, his data illustrate clearly one of the important points I wanted to make in my paper.

One may be cheered by the fact that the employment of COTAs in these settings has risen, concerned by the fact that the employment of OTRs has decreased, or deeply pessimistic about the future of the profession in community mental health given the small total number of occupational therapy personnel employed in these facilities. These data need to be examined carefully, and proactive plans need to be developed if occupational therapy is to play an important role in community mental health as it should.

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Applauds Article on AIDS

If I could thank Rick Denton personally, I would. That notwithstanding, on behalf of my partner, the late Alvin K. Adami, OTR, the Sacramento AIDS Foundation, and all those dedicated to fighting this pernicious condition, I want to applaud the American Journal of Occupational Therapy for publishing "AIDS: Guidelines for Occupational Therapy Intervention" (July 1987 issue). The article is lucid, sensitive, accurate, and complete.

After Al was first diagnosed with AIDS, one of the significant issues which he raised—and to which he never did get a clear answer—was whether he could return to hospital practice as an occupational therapist. Partly because this issue was unresolved, he spent the last 2 years of his life working in paid and unpaid positions for the Sacramento AIDS Foundation. It is very encouraging to see professional organizations promulgating accurate and sensitive information to their members, and I can only hope that the information results in both attitudinal and behavioral changes (as necessary) in your membership.

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