Agrees With Denton on AIDS

As a Lesbian occupational therapist, I found Rick Denton’s article on AIDS published in the July 1987 issue very interesting and comprehensive. Its emotional tone, in particular, was appealing to me. All too often we therapists allow ourselves to become entangled with facts and figures. The psychological and emotional overlay of AIDS far outweighs the rational statistics that accompany the disease.

I agree with Mr. Denton that we therapists need to recognize the person with AIDS as an individual rather than as a member of a stereotyped group and that we have an obligation to educate ourselves about AIDS. Let us extend our talents and gifts of love to those whose lives are deteriorating as a result of AIDS. Let us try to add life to their remaining days lest they be dominated by fears and anxieties.

May Rick Denton be remembered for his courage to pioneer in this controversial health area and for sharing his knowledge and feelings so that we, as therapists, will better understand our roles in dealing with AIDS patients.

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Access to Literature Is Basic to Research

Recently, there have been several articles in the Nationally Speaking column stressing the importance of research to the profession and encouraging practitioners to engage in more research projects. The role of AOTA in promoting research needs to be much more specific than prodding and cajoling practitioners. More money to the Foundation to fund projects is not the ultimate answer either. AOTA must help occupational therapists take the basic steps that have been taken by every profession that engages in research as a major function. First and foremost, a serious effort needs to be made to identify the literature in the field and create a comprehensive bibliography. No comprehensive bibliography of occupational therapy has been published by AOTA since 1938 (Sands, 1938).

Bibliographies published since then have listed primarily articles in the American Journal of Occupational Therapy. Yet other publications and publishers have produced at least 1,500 articles, 600 books and pamphlets, and 200 chapters on occupational therapy since 1940. These items do not include the foreign journals of occupational therapy, which are also a rich source of information.

Another important task is indexing. Literature, once identified, should be indexed to permit easier retrieval. AOTA cannot depend on the National Library of Medicine (NLM) to do its work. Many journals important to the profession are not indexed at all because their score is not medicine, or they are indexed only selectively in Index Medicus (print version) and MEDLINE (computer version) or in Hospital Literature (print version) and Health Planning and Administration (computer version). Furthermore, the definition of occupational therapy used by the indexes often includes music therapy, recreation therapy, vocational rehabilitation, occupational psychology, horticulture therapy, drama therapy, and other activity-oriented disciplines. If the profession is to have a useful index to occupational therapy literature, AOTA will have to begin the task. Once the basic index has been developed, AOTA could use the services and expertise of a publisher such as Glendate Adventist Medical Center, which publishes the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature.

Furthermore, those who encourage therapists to read the literature in occupational therapy must become aware that the literature in the profession did not begin in 1922 with Meyer’s article on occupation therapy. Meyer simply summarized a little of the existing literature which goes back into the eighteen hundreds. Of importance to mental health are the articles on moral treatment and the arts and crafts movement. Of importance to physical disabilities are the origins of orthopedics prior to the turn of the century and the development of treatment programs in Canada, Germany, France, and Great Britain during World War I. Much of the equipment used in physical disabilities originated in concept prior to 1920. Graduate programs in occupational therapy need to have access to a library rich in resources of occupational therapy literature. The American Journal of Occupational Therapy and Occupational Therapy and Rehabilitation are not enough. Nor can the graduate programs depend on the National Library of Medicine and Library of Congress. Each has fewer than half of 600 books and pamphlets identified as written by occupational therapists or on occupational therapy subjects.

Good research is built on a foundation of knowledge and information that is available and has been analyzed for important ideas and concepts. Such knowledge is usually located in a profession’s literature.

Occupational therapy needs access to its literature. Accessing begins with bibliographies, indexes, and well-stocked libraries. A few dollars spent on creating bibliographies and indexing and on developing library collections could provide big dividends in the form of more and improved research projects that speak to central concepts of occupational therapy as a unique and vital discipline. If the members of AOTA want to make research an integral part of the profession, the place to start is Step 1.

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Reference


Response

Dr. Reed correctly identifies several problems that constrain the development of research in occupational therapy. I would agree that we need to do a better job of organizing and cataloging the literature of the field since this will facilitate the work of educators and investigators.

Along these lines, it can be argued that our field’s historical allegiance to consensus and our avoidance of conflict have militated against the adoption of a framework that permits our literature to be accurately identified. Occupational therapy has been defined by practitioners in the broadest possible way, thus creating problems for educators, students,