LETTER TO THE EDITOR

OT Manpower Shortage, Cooperative Education, and OT March of Dimes

Recently, a shortage of manpower was named as the most critical issue facing the profession (1). The growth of our professional educational system has slowed substantially, whereas the vacancy rates for therapist positions range up to 20 percent in Rhode Island and more than 27 percent in Arkansas. Although the AOTA is engaged in several planned manpower-related activities (1), financing for our educational programs could use assistance. One form of assistance would be to greatly increase undergraduate and graduate scholarships. I propose another form, that of financing Cooperative Education Graduate Programs. The American Occupational Therapy Foundation (AOTF) can play a major role in both.

The AOTF’s 1982 Annual Report (2) states that “more than 260 students requested applications for 13 undergraduate scholarship awards that totaled $9,300.” This amount is small compared with the award of $15,000 for the second doctoral and $15,000 for a post-doctoral fellowship. The report points to its achievement of “further ladderization of the total scholarship and research programs.” This “ladder” looks top-heavy! The base of undergraduate and master’s level scholarships must also be broadened to, say, 50 to 100 awards yearly to make a real dent in the manpower shortage.

I propose that a direct appeal be made to every occupational therapist to participate in “THE OT MARCH OF DIES” for professional education. This appeal could accompany every issue of AJOT, OT Newspaper and OTJR, asking for 10¢ a week, earmarked for occupational therapy education, from each participant in return for membership in the AOTF. This would give the AOTF the “grass roots” of a membership constituency as well as its own fund-raising program. Members would be kept up-to-date on the use of their contributions and the benefits that result to the profession, thus making them feel active partners in the Foundation’s plans and activities.

The monies generated by this appeal would also be used for setting up Cooperative Education Graduate Programs in occupational therapy. The Cooperative Education Model has gained ground in recent years. “Cooperative education represents a working partnership in which an educational institution joins with an employer in a structured relationship. Its basic purpose is that of providing a means whereby a student can combine study at an institution with a work experience that is under the supervision of the employer in order to fulfill the total requirements of a particular educational program.” (3) In practice, a student in a Cooperative Education Program (which generally takes longer than conventional academic programs) alternates study periods on-campus and off-campus, the latter as a paid trainee at a cooperating institution or company. The advantages for the student are: gaining practical experience, with pay, in his or her chosen field, while earning academic credits; and, to the cooperating employer, an opportunity to train future professionals in specific areas of importance to the employer, as well as an opportunity to attract selected students for permanent employment after completion of the Program.

In occupational therapy, Advanced Master’s Degree Work-Study programs are offered at New York University (NYU) in collaboration with the United Cerebral Palsy Association, in Developmental Disabilities, and with Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital and other designated facilities, in Mental Health (4). The Work-Study set-up at NYU, as described, differs from the typical Cooperative Education paradigm in that the on-the-job time does not form a distinct block, such as a semester off-campus, alternating with time blocks on-campus. It will be of interest to our profession to observe the development of NYU’s pioneering programs.

A Cooperative Education Graduate Program for the advanced professional master’s in occupational therapy would provide the much-needed bridge between the academic and the clinical occupational therapy settings. A newly graduated or a practicing OTR, as well as a professional re-entry candidate, would be attracted by the option of acquiring a master’s in occupational therapy in a Cooperative Education Graduate Program. During an introductory period of full-time residence on campus, the student’s academic advisor would help the student define an area of major interest and specialization, and gain the necessary expertise in research methodology. The clinical specialization, during which the student would be paid by the cooperating institution, would serve to provide clinical expertise in the student’s chosen area and to execute a master’s thesis research project in collaboration with the student’s clinical and academic advisors. This
research, which is clearly within the scope of AOTF, would be supplemented by financial support from the Foundation for needs not covered through the student’s employment to the cooperating employer. Thus, the proposed Cooperative Study Graduate Programs would serve (2) to train cadres of research-oriented, academically qualified, and clinically rooted master’s level occupational therapists, who will in time take their place among the leadership of the profession; (b) provide a desirable re-entry route for experienced occupational therapists; (c) provide a bridge between academic and clinical faculty; (d) provide an effective framework of combined academic-clinical professional specialization; (e) provide interested clinicians with an opportunity for research participation and active academic affiliation; and (f) give AOTF a strong raison d’être for expanding its activities for ‘critical occupational therapy research’ as well as for graduate education(5).

In summary, our profession faces critical issues in manpower (1), education (6, 7), and research (5, 8, 9), and showed foresight by setting up the AOTF in 1963 as a beneficial nonprofit educational and research foundation. The program has an organization to provide much-needed solutions, some of which are outlined above, with the direct involvement of our rank and file membership.

Note: Details on the Cooperative Education Model are obtainable from the National Commission for Cooperative Education, 860 Huntington Avenue, Boston, MA 02215.

Renate L. Neeman, Ph.D.
OTR \ F AOTA
Mo Neeman, Ph.D. \ FAIC \ FRHC
FRSH

REFERENCES

GUIDELINES
FOR PLANNING
A WORKSHOP

At last, a complete workbook that takes you step-by-step through the entire process of planning a successful workshop from the general planning committee to specifics such as location, date, & facilities, from general correspondence to the development of brochures or pamphlets, from the financial to the audiovisual, from the registration to the evaluation. It’s all here. And there’s room on each page for your own personal plans in conjunction with the guidelines.

ORDER YOUR COPY TODAY!

Please send me __________ copies of the “Guidelines For Planning A Workshop” at $4.00 (Members) and $6.00 (Non-members) prepaid. Please make checks payable to AOTA.

Name ____________________________
Address __________________________________________
City __________________________________ State __________ Zip __________

Mail to: AOTA Products
1383 Piccard Drive
Rockville, MD 20850

April 1983. Volume 37. Number 10

Downloaded From: http://ajot.aota.org/ on 10/23/2018 Terms of Use: http://AOTA.org/terms