As medical treatments advance and the U.S. population ages, the prevalence of people living with neurodegenerative diseases is growing. Neurodegenerative diseases are characterized by progressive loss of structure or function of neurons in the brain or spinal cord or both. This deterioration affects a variety of body systems, resulting in a complex array of changes in motor, cognitive, sensory, and emotional functioning that have widespread effects on all areas of occupation.

**Occupational Therapy and Neurodegenerative Diseases**

Even with optimal medical management, people with neurodegenerative diseases experience reduced performance of and participation in meaningful activities and roles. Working to maximize daily function and quality of life despite the inevitable progression of disease-related impairments is recognized as a critical component of clinical care for these clients. Occupational therapy is often called on to fill this role. With this responsibility comes the necessity to demonstrate that we can do so efficiently and effectively. Providing this evidence is particularly crucial in the rapidly changing health care climate, in which pressure is increasing to improve quality of care while reducing costs.

More than a decade ago, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) conducted a systematic review of the evidence for occupational therapy–related interventions for adults with neurodegenerative diseases (47 studies published from 1985 to 2002). Although this review found small to moderate positive effects of occupational therapy in this practice area (Baker & Tickle-Degnen, 2001; Murphy & Tickle-Degnen, 2001), the evidence was limited and not always of the highest quality (Forwell, 2006). The state of occupational therapy’s science and research capacity has since evolved, and it is now time to reappraise the evidence we have to support our profession’s ability to meet the needs of adults with neurodegenerative diseases.

It is my pleasure to introduce this special issue of the *American Journal of Occupational Therapy* on occupational therapy for adults with neurodegenerative diseases. Experts in the field have critically appraised and synthesized the latest and best available evidence for interventions within the scope of occupational therapy for four of the most common adult neurodegenerative diseases: Alzheimer’s disease (AD), Parkinson’s disease (PD), multiple sclerosis (MS), and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS).

The articles in this issue on the effects of occupational therapy–related interventions for PD (Foster, Bedekar, & Tickle-Degnen, 2014), MS (Yu & Mathiowetz, 2014), and ALS (Foster, 2014)

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**Erin R. Foster, OTD, MSCI, OTR/L**

Erin R. Foster, OTD, MSCI, OTR/L, is Assistant Professor, Program in Occupational Therapy, Departments of Neurology and Psychiatry, Washington University School of Medicine, 660 South Euclid Avenue, Campus Box 8111, St. Louis, MO 63110; erfoster@wustl.edu

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Some of the most effective interventions presented in these systematic reviews, combined with a client-centered approach, can contribute to long-term engagement and even lower in people with neurodegenerative disorders “live life to its fullest.” ▲

**References**


