Editorial comment

It is with great sadness that the Occupational Therapy Association of South Africa learned of the death of Professor Phillip Tobias, Emeritus Professor and the University of the Witwatersrand. Professor Tobias, a world renowned palaeoanthropologist and anatomist, will be remembered by many occupational therapists who trained at the University of the Witwatersrand for the way in which he brought the second year subject of anatomy to life. Who will forget Professor Tobias jumping on to the desk at the front of the Hunterian lecture theatre in the old Medical School in Hillbrow, Johannesburg and showing the class how ancient man moved? Who will forget the living demonstrations of muscles at work when Reg Parks rippled his muscles for all to identify as well as the ballerinas demonstrating the wonders of the human body and the movements that is it capable of. Prof Tobias was the Director of the Sterkfontein Palaeoanthropology Research unit for many years and contributed to the Sterkfontein site’s development as the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage site. He was a gentle caring person who never forgot the name of any of his students.

It is not only those of us who were students at the University of the Witwatersrand who will remember him but also the South African occupational therapists at large who will remember the assistance and mentoring provided by Professor Tobias in the dark days of apartheid for Professor Tobias was a well known anti apartheid activist and a member of the Association’s Advisory Board. Prof Tobias will be fondly remembered by all who came into contact with him.

In this journal we have published a “Letter to the Editor”1. It is satisfying to know that some of the readers take up issues that are mentioned in the South African Journal of Occupational Therapy (SAJOT) and I hope that this is the beginning of discussions in SAJOT around important issues affecting Occupational Therapy in South Africa.

The first article2 in this edition provides the results of the research into the relationship between developmental dyspraxia and sensory responsivity. The first part of the research was published in SAJOT in volume 40(3)2. This second part focuses attention on the importance of clinical analysis of test results in the diagnostic process and provides interesting information for those occupational therapists using sensory integration techniques in therapy.

The second article3 is the continuation of the series of three reporting on a study to develop an outcome measure for mental health treatment settings. In this instance the users of mental health services were interviewed to determine their needs and expectations of the occupational therapy service. The results were compared to the domains identified by the therapists and described previously4. It is reassuring to note that domains identified by the occupational therapists who were linked to service delivery were congruent with the needs and wants of the patients.

The article entitled “Assessment of record keeping at schools for learners with special needs in the Western Cape”5 discusses the status of occupational therapy record keeping at these schools. The importance of accurate records of occupational therapy intervention cannot be over emphasised. It appears from this research that the keeping of records by occupational therapists is somewhat inadequate. The authors of this paper have provided guidelines in the form of a check list to assist therapists to do this important job.

It seems that this is an aspect of the job of occupational therapists that should be given more attention in training.

The fourth article6 takes a look at the scores obtained by children completing the Developmental Test of Visual Perception, 2nd edition and the visual closure sub-test in particular as clinical experience showed that children often obtained a below average score on this particular sub-test within the DTVP. This was indeed proved to be the case and indicates the need for South African therapists to interpret the results of the visual closure sub-test with caution.

References

ME Concha
Editor SAJOT

Letter to the Editor: SAJOT

May 28, 2012

Dear Editor,

You posed a very good question in the April 2012 SAJOT: Why is the role of the Occupational Therapist (OT) so poorly understood after 70 years of the professions presence in SA? My colleagues and I can confirm this lament. Working in the field of Vocational Rehabilitation we constantly have to explain our roles to employers, lawyers, labour and union representatives and human relations officers. The General Public out there does not know what an Occupational Therapist is.

May I approach your question with another question: Why are ‘well known’ professions – so well known – by the General Public? Other ‘well known’ professions that are not on the ‘needs and wants’ list are Politicians, Singers, Actors, Sportsmen and Businessmen. Power, sex, money and violence - grabs the attention of the General Public - but are not attributes associate with Occupational Therapist. (At least not in my experience.)

In addition Occupational Therapy is multi-faceted: Just when the General Public thinks: “Ah-ha. I know what an Occupational Therapist does! She works with learning disabled children.” They meet an OT who works with people who have a psychiatric illness, or a therapist who works with Hand injuries or an OT doing Medico Legal work. It could confuse even the most studious of the general population.

But it’s not only ‘external factors beyond our control’ that affect the General Public’s understanding of Occupational Therapy.