

[EDITORIAL COMMENT]



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OTASA: 80 Years of support, guidance and leadership

This year, we celebrate the 80th Anniversary of our professional Association.

Since its establishment in 1945, the Occupational Therapy Association of South Africa (OTASA) has played a pivotal role in the development and advancement of occupational therapy in South Africa and has been instrumental in promoting professional standards, influencing policies, supporting research dissemination, and guiding the quality of education for occupational therapists in the country. Through its dedicated efforts, the association has fostered a strong and dynamic occupational therapy community that continues to evolve in response to the country's healthcare and social needs.

Establishing and Promoting Occupational Therapy in South Africa

Occupational therapy was formally introduced in South Africa in the 1940s, and OTASA (then known as South African Association of Occupational Therapy (SAAOT)), was founded to unify practitioners, advocate for the profession, and provide a platform for professional collaboration. One of the primary objectives of the association has been to support the recognition of occupational therapy as a crucial healthcare discipline, ensuring its integration into medical, rehabilitative, and community-based healthcare services.

Over the decades, OTASA has actively engaged with government bodies, policymakers, and healthcare institutions to establish occupational therapy as an essential component of healthcare. By lobbying for occupational therapy services in public hospitals, schools, and rehabilitation centres, the association has helped to expand the scope of practice and ensure that occupational therapists play a critical role in multidisciplinary teams addressing physical, cognitive, lifestyle, occupational and psychosocial challenges across all age groups.

Maintaining Standards of Practice and Education

A key function of OTASA has been to maintain and enhance the professional standards of occupational therapy practice¹. The association has been instrumental in developing guidelines and ethical frameworks that define best practices for practitioners. By working closely with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) and academic institutions, OTASA has ensured that occupational therapy education aligns with international standards and remains relevant to the country's unique healthcare challenges.

OTASA has played a crucial role in shaping the curriculum for occupational therapy programmes at eight universities across South Africa. The association has continually provided input into the accreditation of training programmes, ensuring that students are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to address both traditional and emerging occupational therapy needs¹. Furthermore, OTASA has been active in supporting continued professional development (CPD) for qualified therapists, offering workshops, training sessions, and conferences to keep practitioners updated on the latest research and advancements in the field.

Influence on Research and Policy Development

OTASA has also been a major proponent of occupational therapy research in South Africa. By supporting academic inquiry and evidence-based practice, the association has helped shape the evolution of the profession. One of the key ways in which OTASA has facilitated research dissemination is through the establishment and publication of the *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy* (SAJOT).

SAJOT, which is published three times per year, serves as the premier scholarly journal for the occupational therapy profession in South Africa, and is fully funded by OTASA. It provides a vital platform for researchers, educators, and practitioners to share findings, case studies, and theoretical developments. By offering a space for local and international research contributions, SAJOT has significantly influenced the growth of occupational therapy knowledge and practice in South Africa and beyond.

Through SAJOT, OTASA has ensured that occupational therapy practitioners have access to the latest research, allowing them to implement evidence-based interventions in clinical and community settings. This is made possible due to the support of OTASA in the SAJOT obtaining Diamond Open Access status, which implies that readers have free access to all published material and authors are not charged any article processing fees (APC's) to publish in the SAJOT. Moreover, the journal can contribute to the global exchange of knowledge by allowing South African researchers to engage freely with international occupational therapy discourse.

In 2018, as one of the ten founding members of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) in 1952² OTASA co-hosted the 17th WFOT congress, the first to be held in Africa. This congress, themed *Connected in diversity: positioned for impact* showcased how developments in occupational therapy in Africa have involved confronting issues of social inequality, poverty and violence³.

Advocacy and Support for Occupational Therapists

Beyond its role in education and research, OTASA has been a strong advocate for the rights and interests of occupational therapists in South Africa. The association has worked tirelessly to ensure fair labour practices, equitable remuneration, and professional recognition for occupational therapists across different sectors. By engaging with government agencies and private sector stakeholders, OTASA has helped to secure improved working conditions and career opportunities for practitioners.

OTASA has also been a leading voice in promoting the role of occupational therapy in addressing social justice issues, including disability rights, mental health support, and community-based rehabilitation. The association has actively participated in national health discussions and policy formulation, advocating for the inclusion of occupational therapy services in public health programmes and disability support initiatives.

Conclusion

Over the past 80 years, the Occupational Therapy Association of South Africa has been the driving force in the development and

advancement of occupational therapy in the country. Through its efforts in education, research, policy advocacy, and professional support, OTASA has significantly contributed to the growth and recognition of the profession. By publishing the SAJOT, the association has provided a crucial platform for knowledge dissemination, ensuring that occupational therapists in South Africa remain informed, skilled, and prepared to meet the evolving needs of their patients and communities. As the profession continues to develop, OTASA remains committed to fostering excellence and innovation in occupational therapy for the benefit of both practitioners and the populations they serve.

On behalf of the editorial team, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the OTASA Council, all the office bearers of the OTASA office, and the chair of the Publications Committee, for their continued support, advice, and guidance.

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