

# WORKING FOR THE FUTURE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY: STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES OF THE WORLD FEDERATION OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS

## TRABAJANDO PARA EL FUTURO DE LA TERAPIA OCUPACIONAL: ACTIVIDADES ESTRATÉGICAS DE LA FEDERACIÓN MUNDIAL DE TERAPEUTAS OCUPACIONALES

**Key Words:** occupational therapy, World Federation of Occupational Therapy, occupation

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### Author

#### Ms. Kit Sinclair, PhD

*Adjunct Associate Professor, Curtin University in Perth, Australia. International education consultant in the areas of occupational therapy service and curriculum development with a particular emphasis on her research area in applied learning. Honorary Fellow of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists and Fellow of the American Occupational Therapy Association and most recently served as President of the World Federation from 2002-2008.*

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## Introduction

The World Federation of Occupational Therapists is the key international representative of occupational therapists. It directly links 66 member countries and organisations across the world, has an individual membership of over 7000 therapists and a country membership that represents over 320,000 occupational therapists worldwide (1)

The energy and vitality of this dynamic organization continue to carry the Federation forward with commitment and energy. New organisational members are joining the Federation at every Council Meeting. They bring with them their experience, their culture, their skills and expertise. The Federation values this diversity and shared professional knowledge.

## SUMMARY

As the key international representative of occupational therapy and occupational therapists, the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) reviews, discusses and strategically plans its projects and ongoing functions to meet the needs of the changing world of health and healthcare. The issues that are faced by occupational therapists and healthcare professionals include such factors as globalization, demographic and societal change, new medical technologies, rising consumer expectations, health informatics, increasing costs of health and social services provision, and the need of the health system to adjust from acute care to chronic care. WFOT continues to be a high energy, dynamic organisation with its roots firmly planted in tradition, its present focused on action and its future determined by its vision. This article will review present achievements as well as the way that WFOT is meeting identified challenges for the future.

## RESUMEN

Como la clave representativa internacional de la terapia ocupacional y de los terapeutas ocupacionales, la Federación Mundial de Terapeutas Ocupacionales (WFOT) revisa, discute y planifica estratégicamente sus proyectos y funciones para hacer frente a las necesidades del mundo cambiante de la salud y de sus cuidados. Las cuestiones a las que tienen que enfrentarse terapeutas ocupacionales y profesionales de los cuidados de salud incluyen factores como la globalización, los cambios demográficos y de la sociedad, las nuevas tecnologías médicas, las expectativas crecientes de los consumidores, salud informatizada, incremento de los costes de la provisión para la salud y para los servicios sociales, y la necesidad de que el sistema de salud se ajuste de cuidados agudos a cuidados crónicos. WFOT continúa siendo una organización con mucha energía y dinámica con sus raíces asentadas firmemente en la tradición, su presente enfoque es sobre la acción y su futuro determinado por su propia visión. Este artículo revisará éxitos actuales además de la manera que WFOT hace frente a los retos identificados para su futuro.

WFOT is proactively deliberating global issues as we continue to plan for the future.

The Federation's Strategic Plan (2006-2012) reflects the work we have done with consideration for the UN Millennium Development Goals in conjunction with trends and drivers affecting the health and social services sector (2). The strategic plan takes into account such factors as globalization, and in particular the emergence of a global labour market resulting from mobility in labour, demographic and societal change, new medical technologies, rising consumer expectations, health informatics, increasing costs of health and social services provision, and the need of the health system to adjust from acute care to chronic care. It considers the healthcare landscape of the future and where we as occupational therapists could be contributing to that landscape.

Fundamental issues facing healthcare professionals and occupational therapists are based in human rights and participatory involvement in occupation and development for our clients (and for people everywhere).

WFOT master project on human rights with subprojects in 'voices of people with disabilities-consumer interface with occupational therapy' and 'access to occupational therapy education' have both been successfully completed. They address the need to ensure that admission to university education is accessible to students with disabilities and the need to work together with our clients to meet their occupational needs. The WFOT position paper on human rights was ratified by Council in 2006 and includes a definition of occupation (3).

The updated international definition of occupational therapy, ratified by Council in 2006, incorporates the language and thinking of the present millennium. It uses the internationally accepted terminology of WHO's International classification of Functioning (ICF) (4). A definition of occupational therapy must remain dynamic and able to change with the times. Each national association is likely to have its own definition which suits the culture and needs of its own society. Similarly an updated WFOT Code of Ethics was ratified by Council. This provides the foundation upon which national associations may continue to build their own culturally appropriate code to meet their specific national and local requirements.

### **Minimum standards for the education of occupational therapists (2002)**

The international standards have now been fully implemented in all OT education programmes approved by the World Federation. Guidelines for approval and monitoring of programmes have been developed to assist national associations in the process. A position paper on higher education in occupational therapy is posted on the website, [www.wfot.org](http://www.wfot.org)

### **Global competencies**

As the international community of occupational therapy is moving toward identifying global competencies for entry level practice, an ongoing project with the WFOT, an international expert panel was convened at congress to discuss

this issue. They explored through the use of case studies, the need for identifying the level of competence of therapists wishing to work in other countries who have long work experience but not necessarily the required academic qualification. Competencies describe the knowledge skills and attitudes necessary to carry out safe and effective practice. Graduates of WFOT approved education programmes must have attained an acceptable level of mastery in these areas (5). The global project presently being undertaken by WFOT is formed by work done around the world and an excellent foundation to this process which was made in Europe Through The European Network of Occupational Therapists in Higher Education (ENOTHE) and the Council of Occupational Therapists in European Countries (COTEC) (6)

### **UN Global Compact**

The World Federation has a strong history of principles and project work that align with and support the Global Compact, so this voluntary support of the UN initiative is a natural extension of the work of WFOT. This alignment is evident through the World Federation's work in disaster preparedness and response, the position paper and subsequent Community Based Rehabilitation project, and the position statement on Human Rights. Signatory of the UNGC is a mechanism by which the valuable contributions Occupational Therapists make can be further promoted and disseminated amongst UN agencies. As a signatory to the UNGC, the World Federation Executive will report on Federation activity annually to the UN Global Compact office (see WFOT website [www.wfot.org](http://www.wfot.org)).

### **World Health Organisation (WHO)**

Exciting developments are taking place with the Disability and Rehabilitation Team (DAR) of WHO as they meet the challenge of implementing the UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities with global policy (7). Meetings with the DAR Team have lead to the development of the next collaborative action plan 2008-2012 which will significantly increase the WHO-WFOT collaborative activities. One of these activities has been the review and

revision of the preliminary draft of the World Report on Disability and Rehabilitation. WFOT will also significantly contribute to the development of a Rehabilitation Matrix based on the ICF.

### **Disaster preparedness and response**

Disaster preparedness and response is an emerging field of policy and practice for occupational therapy. WFOT encourages collaboration and experience sharing in this emerging field, so that there can be continued development of capacities to appropriately address the needs of people and communities affected by disaster (8). An information and resource package on Disaster Preparedness and Response for Occupational Therapists has been developed and is for sale from the WFOT online shop ([www.wfot.org](http://www.wfot.org)).

### **International Advisory Groups**

WFOT International Advisory Groups (IAG's) have increased in number and continue to allow us to make relevant and informed comments on a number of international issues. They include Occupational Science, Mental Health, Mental Health and the Elderly, Evidence based Occupational Therapy, Accessibility and Participation, Occupational Therapy and the ICF, Health Policy, and E-Health.

### **Development of the profession internationally**

Countries continue to seek assistance of WFOT in the development of services and education. The entire Executive Team are involved in responding to these enquiries at various levels. A major project has been developed within the International Cooperation Programme to facilitate this process of development in Egypt and Mongolia. The Interim Executive Meeting was held in Egypt in April 2007 and concluded with a hugely successful inaugural Arabic Regional Occupational Therapy Conference with occupational therapists attending from Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and many other countries around the region. The conference also saw the establishment of the Arabic Occupational Therapists Regional Group

## **Bulletin**

The Bulletin plays a pivotal role in sharing of understanding of occupational therapy and service delivery, as well as the dissemination of information on activities undertaken around the world. It is an important archive of the development of global occupational therapy and the WFOT. Copies of Bulletin articles can also be purchased via the WFOT on-line shop.

## **Website**

The website is most certainly the public interface of WFOT attracting millions of hits from people around the world. A range of discussion forums can be found on the website. There continues to be the opportunity to share views on the WFOT website via the discussion forums in OTION which now includes an exciting new forum -- The Forum for occupational therapists with disabilities was launched on the OTION, WFOT website in March 2007. Discussion forums can also be found under OT Evidence.

There is lots of information available to individual members through the members' only area on the site and members who have activated their membership on the site have access to the Bulletin on-line and receive a twice yearly e-newsletter. Other new products available on the website include updated posters, DVD's and publications. For those who want to "send the WFOT message" free e-cards are also available on line.

## **WFOT Congress 2010**

Following on from the huge success of the WFOT 2006 Congress in Sydney Australia an enthusiastic and energetic team of occupational therapists in Chile have plans well progressed for the WFOT2010 Congress in Santiago, Chile from 4-7 May 2010. This will be the first time that a WFOT Congress will be held in South America. The 15th WFOT World Congress focuses on contemporary perspectives in occupational therapy and occupational science. Many of these perspectives emerge from the historical roots of international practice while others reflect the thinking of current times. The Congress incorporates human

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rights as a necessary framework for the development of the science and occupational therapy. The Congress themes guide the presentations yet provide the flexibility for unique and refreshing viewpoints, evidence to support theory and practice policy development and most importantly to engage in comparative exercises across all aspects of occupational therapy and occupational science. The exploration of the forces acting on the profession's knowledge and domains of practice is essential. Congress participants will participate in stimulating reflective dialogue about their practice and personal contexts as well as the emerging evidence which distinguishes Latin American practice. The Call for Abstracts can be viewed through the WFOT website. <http://www.wfot.org> the deadline is 15 April 2009.

*Congress Themes include:*

1. *Human Rights and Occupational Therapy*
2. *Occupational Therapy practice development  
Culture and Occupation*
3. *Occupational Practice: Past and Future Trends.*
4. *Quality and Management*
5. *Occupational Therapy Education: The Profession & Discipline.*
6. *Occupation, Daily Life, Subjectivity and Occupational Therapy.*

### **Addressing challenges for the future**

WFOT continues to be a high energy, dynamic organisation with its roots firmly planted in tradition, its present focused on action and its future determined by its vision. The Executive Management Team encourages all occupational therapists to talk to us, to link with us and to work with us in these exciting times.

So how is the World Federation addressing the challenges of the future?

As world demographics change so do the requirements for health and occupational therapy services. I see the occupational therapy profession as

constantly evolving to meet society's needs. We can see this historically in many countries already as OTs provide work rehab in factories rather than clinics, for instance, or the response to the Asian tsunami of 2004 where local OT's trained volunteers to work with the vast numbers of survivors affected by the disaster. OT can realize a tremendous unfulfilled potential using a diversity of vision and practice.

Our future lies in being proactive in relation to global and local trends and here are some examples of how the Federation is responding to these trends:

- OT will become more global and will address occupation based problems of individuals and communities in transition-e.g. those affected by migration, disaster, or human conflict. This involves supporting people through the psychological stress as well as adjustment to new settings and circumstances. There need to be more occupational therapists trained in this area and willing to take up the role. *The World Federation is addressing this through the WFOT Disaster Preparedness and Response project*
- We need to tackle issues which affect human occupations such as environment and climate change. We can not remain immune to these concerns as being outside our sphere of practice. *The World Federation is addressing this through its International Advisory Group (IAG)-Occupational Science*
- We need to be involved in establishing practice standards and equality of service in these emerging areas *The World Federation is addressing this through the WFOT Global Competencies project*
- There will continue to be a broadening role for OT in primary health care, health promotion and prevention. This will include particularly the aging population and those with chronic conditions, but also healthy people as well as those already affected by disease or disability. *The World Federation is addressing this through its newly established IAG - Access and Participation*



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- Internet access means a well informed client group with demands for up-to-date services which are evidence based. OTs are responded by being more knowledgeable through appropriate research. The World Federation is offering website links to evidence based portals and associated websites
  - We need to continue to develop and incorporate information technology - using different and various means of communication and treatment implementation with our clients. Tele-rehab and virtual home visits are becoming the trend for some remote communities. *The World Federation is addressing this through the newly established IAG on E-Health*
  - Society and government resources will demand increased interdisciplinary collaboration and integration of services particularly in the community. *The World Federation is addressing this through its community based rehabilitation (CBR) and human rights projects*
  - There also needs to be stronger liaison with other professions outside health care such as architects and town planners so our knowledge of health and disability requirements can be shared and developed. The World Federation is addressing this through its IAG - Access and Participation
  - Occupational therapists need to develop their roles as social change agents, rather than just as professionals that make a difference at the level of people's individual lives. In order to become change agents, the education of occupational therapists must include a strong component on enablement, advocacy, and social reform. *The World Federation is addressing this through the WFOT Minimum Standards and supported through OTION discussion forums, WFOT position papers, and information available on the WFOT website*
  - We must also maintain our sensitivity to local context as reflected in the Minimum Standards for the Education of Occupational Therapists (2002). *This is demonstrated in current projects on the*

*development of the profession in Egypt and Mongolia, and the support WFOT continue to offer to national associations both new and well established.*

Occupational therapists must not be complacent. The profession in order to thrive must reflect on our present practice and our vision for the future. Some of this reflection is taking place in national associations around the world as with the World Federation (note the report of WFOT pre-Council Focus Day "Landscape of the Future" in the WFOT Bulletin in November 2007). We need to work together to ensure that vision becomes a reality.

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