Characteristics of 11 Occupational Therapist Alumnae

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An occupational therapy program was begun at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston in 1976. Since then, 18 have graduated with baccalaureate degrees from the school. In 1980 a survey was done to determine various demographic, employment, and educational characteristics of these alumni. Addresses were available for 17 of the alumni, and questionnaires were mailed to each of them. Eleven (65%) therapists completed and returned the questionnaires.

Demographics. All 11 respondents were women, their average age was 23.4 (SD 1.0), and 6 were single. They averaged four years of college education (SD 0.3).

Nine were residents of South Carolina when they entered the program. Six chose to attend the Charleston program because it was near their home. Only four learned about their profession from work-related experiences. The remainder were recruited into occupational therapy or learned of it from a relative.

Employment. Nine of the therapists looked for employment immediately after graduation. All 11 reported being employed as therapists when surveyed; 10 were working full-time and 1 part-time. Seven of the graduates were employed in South Carolina. Nine were employed in an urban health care facility (population more than 80,000), six were employed in private or community hospitals, four in rehabilitation centers, and one in a public school.

The most frequently reported salary ranged from $13,000 to $15,000. Three therapists reported salaries between $11,000 and $13,000, and one between $17,000 and $19,000.

Job Satisfaction. The questionnaire contained ten items consisting of seven choices of degree of job satisfaction (1). Generally, a choice of options 1, 2, or 3 means job dissatisfaction; choice 4, somewhat neutral; and choices 5, 6, or 7, job satisfaction. The relative frequency of job satisfaction was calculated for all respondents. The majority, or eight, reported above average to very high job satisfaction. Only one reported job dissatisfaction.

Seven said that they would choose the same profession again, one would not, and three were undecided. Only two therapists felt restricted by their employer or by the law in performing their job. Seven were members of the American Occupational Therapy Association.

Education. Ten therapists were satisfied with their professional education. Six wanted to study for an advanced degree. Two wanted to plan a course of study that would change their professional role, and two wanted to attend frequent continuing education programs. Six reported attending continuing medical education programs once a month, three only twice a year.

Discussion

The graduates of the Charleston program represented a relatively young group of therapists who had been working in their profession for less than two years. Therefore, it may not be surprising that 100 percent were employed in occupational therapy and that most were satisfied with their jobs. Considering their newness to the profession, however, the salary ranges were quite good when compared to other allied health professionals. Nine other allied health professions were surveyed with the same questionnaire and the most frequently reported salary range was from $13,000 to $15,000 for all graduates of the Medical University since 1972. It seems that occupational therapists who had been working in their profession for only one or two years had already reached the average salary for all allied health professionals.

Most therapists said they were satisfied with their profession, but more than half indicated that they wanted an advanced degree that would possibly change their professional role. Clearly, this group of therapists seems to have definite career plans.

This survey represents a small number of new therapists so that the results cannot be extrapolated to all occupational therapists, but it does provide some positive information about employment characteristics, educational status, and job satisfaction that could be useful when counseling students about the health professions. The results also provide some clues to the identity and success of graduates in occupational therapy. These particular occupational therapists are young women, employed in urban hospitals, who like their work and seem to have definite professional goals and aspirations.

REFERENCE