FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR

Dear AJOT Editor: Have You Lost Your Mind?

Occupational therapy practitioners as a whole are a very kind group. Rarely is feedback offered to a colleague without concern for maintaining self-esteem—more often a plan of action is suggested. Despite this tendency for gentleness, I fully expected several letters to the editor requesting an update on my cognitive status following the most recent editorial (July/August 2003). As those of you who read that editorial know, I proposed a vision for AJOT that seeks to establish the journal as a forum linking research and practice. Not satisfied to stop there, I suggested that occupational therapy practitioners will eventually regard AJOT as fully relevant and applicable to everyday practice. Oh boy—I heard from my occupational therapy friends in practice after that!

One friend showed me her “work pile,” which contained two back issues of AJOT, eight issues of OT Practice, several copies of articles, newsletters from the state association and the licensure board, printed e-mails, and various letters. Teetering on the top of everything was a thick stack of documentation forms that had to be completed and were due the next day. She couldn’t keep up with what she already had. Even if AJOT is stuffed with relevant articles, when was she supposed to find time to read them? My friend didn’t think it was funny when I suggested we adopt a “books on tape” approach to AJOT.

Another friend and colleague gently reminded me of the need to address strategies for helping occupational therapy practitioners influence the type of research being conducted. I asked her to join the editorial board after she wrote:

I guess my common theme is easily accomplished. Practitioners have very little time to treat, need to understand reimbursement, are perfect candidates to assist with marketing OT, and certainly have the clients for research...if they understand the purpose and how it will assist their practice. Practitioners are less interested in research validation and statistical analysis...but want to know how this can help me perform my job better...and quickly, too.

She’s right of course, yet the audience for AJOT also includes professionals who are interested in theory and the nuances of methodology. These educators and researchers have precariously balanced work piles too, must respond to unmanageable time pressures, and depend on published literature. AJOT serves two masters.

At times I get a visual image of the profession as consisting of two icons—one representing an educator–researcher and the other a master clinician. These two occupational therapy icons stand with their backs to one another and speak to very different but equally demanding audiences. The work conducted by each is essential to the existence of the other, yet time and circumstance make it difficult to turn around and work together. Indeed, how can they even hear one another over the din caused by the audiences each faces?

I don’t have the answers and maybe I have lost my mind. It may be many years of hard work before those two occupational therapy icons merge into one clinical scholar. The solutions probably range from simple to difficult. The more simple solutions include labeling AJOT articles with practice key words, in addition to the key word system currently used, so practitioners can quickly skim the table of contents for any information that is relevant to their needs. Inviting practitioners to serve as AJOT reviewers will also shape the journal and can be a very powerful way to create a dialogue among researchers, educators, and clinicians. More difficult solutions remain to be developed and implemented, including clarifying how research should be written for translation to prac-
tice, how to read and keep current with the literature, and how to establish a satisfying and productive academic–clinician partnership. In addition, the unique perspectives of students and consumers must be understood as they are each profoundly shaped by the experience of occupational therapy.

Our profession is not the only one struggling with a knowledge–practice gap. However, there is no doubt that occupational therapy has the talent and the will to close that gap. I appreciate everyone’s suggestions so keep those cards, letters, and e-mails coming.

Call for Editorial Board Members

The American Journal of Occupational Therapy (AJOT)® is seeking new editorial board members to serve 3-year terms beginning January 2004.

Candidates who are knowledgeable about the research process, have a record of publication, and are able to complete an analytic review of manuscripts in a timely manner are sought. Also encouraged to apply are master clinicians who are able to review manuscripts for the purpose of evaluating their contribution to practice.

Submit curriculum vitae and areas of expertise to Mary A. Corcoran, PhD, OTR/L, Editor, AJOT, 2901 Oak Shadow Drive, Oak Hill, VA 20171.