

Improving Racial & Ethnic Diversity in OT: A Historical Analysis With Implications for the Future

Molly A. McCarthy, PhD, MPH, Andrew Hogan

University of Nebraska, Omaha, NE, USA

DOI: [10.5014/ajot.2023.77S2-RP17](https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2023.77S2-RP17)

Date presented: April 21, 2023

Primary Author and Speaker: Molly A. McCarthy, mmccarthy@unmc.edu

OT literature has noted the persistent lack of racial/ethnic diversity in the profession (AOTA, 2020) and recently, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) added equity, inclusion, and diversity to Vision 2025 (AOTA, 2022). Though historically there have been efforts to improve diversity in OT, prior research has not addressed the trajectory and the successes of those efforts. Drawing from grey literature, this research used an inductive analytic approach to describe the efforts during the 1990s to improve diversity in occupational therapy, to characterize the circumstances that led to waxing and waning concern for those efforts, and to identify lessons learned. This historical analysis showed that a workforce shortage led to interest in recruiting and retaining underrepresented groups in OT. Toward that end, AOTA began the minority recruitment task force, which was led by members of the Black Occupational Therapy Caucus (BOTC), and it began the Minority Affairs Program. Despite about ten years of investment in these efforts on the part of AOTA, they were sidelined due to external pressures, most notably the Balanced Budget Act of 1997. Some important successes from this era included the development and expansion of networks for students and clinicians of color. The BOTC, which expanded during this timeframe, conducted innovative recruitment activities. In addition, the Minority Affairs Program disseminated information about OT practitioners and students of color, reported the perspectives of OTs from diverse backgrounds, and described the importance to OT of issues of racism, segregation, and discrimination. Impact statement: Future efforts to improve DEI in OT may build on prior efforts. Recurring efforts which are prominent, institutionalized, and garner prestige, such as recognition and awards, scholarships, and infrastructure for additional mentorship, networking, and training, may be useful if interest in DEI fades.

References

- American Occupational Therapy Association. (2020). AOTA 2019 workforce and salary survey. <https://library.aota.org/AOTA-Workforce-Salary-Survey-2019/1>
- American Occupational Therapy Association. (2022). About AOTA: Mission and vision. <https://www.aota.org/about/mission-vision>