

THE AMERICAN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY FOUNDATION IS BORN

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How many times have you heard the following words or said them yourself when another occupational therapist was present? "We need to do more research in OT." "We don't have enough textbooks." "Our state association is raising money for an OT scholarship but it takes us years to get enough to finance just one student." "That master's thesis should be part of our professional literature, available to everyone." "A center in London is working on the same sort of OT research that we are, but with a different approach. I wish we could work out an exchange program for OT's between the two countries to share ideas."

Unfortunately the culprit behind these obvious unmet needs in our profession is frequently money—the lack of it. Perhaps an individual occupational therapist has a creative idea for a clinical study. But he cannot complete it because he needs two hundred dollars for an accurate measuring device. Textbooks and monographs are not written because the precious time to write them means money. It is not available. Valuable creative work which could lead to greater professional progress is relegated to the scrap heap labeled "some day."

The New Idea

During the days of reorganization of the AOTA (1964) the Board of Management led by Presi-



Miss Elizabeth Yerxa, who is the current president of the American Occupational Therapy Foundation, discusses the growth and progress of the Foundation.

dent Wilma West recognized these needs by proposing a new idea to the membership. The new idea, if enacted, would enable our own profession to provide financial support to encourage scientific endeavor. It would also encourage contributions not only from occupational therapists but from individuals, corporations or foundations who were friends of occupational therapy.

The idea became a reality on April 14, 1965 when the American Occupational Therapy Association established the American Occupational Therapy Foundation, Inc., a separate corporation. Its purposes were to advance the science of occupational therapy and to increase the public knowledge and understanding of occupational therapy.

Some of our sister organizations, i.e., the American Nurses Association and the American Physical Therapy Association had already established similar foundations to foster creative endeavor and to provide for flexibility in the support of research and education.

Tax Status

On January 24, 1967 the status of the AOTF became that of a charitable and educational tax-exempt foundation as described in Sect. 501C (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. This was a significant step. It meant that all contributions made to the Foundation were income-tax deductible. Bequests to the Foundation (dispositions in wills) were not taxable.

As a result of the establishment of the Foundation, the American Occupational Therapy Association could now function as a business league without endangering its particular tax classification. The Association could thus engage in such practices as legislative lobbying, publishing data designed to raise salaries, improving working conditions, and other activities of direct benefit to its members.

Beginnings

The goals of the American Occupational Therapy Foundation were outlined by its board of directors in October 1966. Following the broad objectives of the Articles of Incorporation, the board established the following as long-term aims:

The particular business and objects of the Corporation shall be to advance the science of occupational therapy and to increase the public knowledge and understanding thereof by the encouragement of the study of occupational therapy (1) through the *provision of scholarships and fellowships*; specifically to develop a program of exchange of foreign and domestic therapists, to provide clinical fellowships, to provide occupational therapy teaching fellowships, to develop a program for exchange of therapists practicing as clinicians and those involved in teaching and professional curricula; (2) by *engaging in studies, surveys and research*; specifically to finance and conduct research studies to contribute to the body of knowledge of occupational therapy; (3) and by *all other proper means*; specifically to provide financial support for visiting lecturers to affiliated associations or their regional groupings, and to provide the means to develop professional literature and teaching aids.

Start Small, Think Big

The pursuit of these long-range aims would require considerable financial resources. Recognizing that the accumulation of such resources would take time, the board still wanted to implement some of its objectives. The following short-term aims were then established (not in order of importance): (1) to invite affiliate associations to pool scholarship funds within the Foundation; (2) to provide financial support for visiting lecturers to affiliated associations or their regional groups and (3) to provide funds for scholarships and for research activities. The watchwords of the Foundation became "start small (of necessity) but think big."

AOTA-AOTF Relationship

The American Occupational Therapy Foundation is a separate corporation from the American Occupational Therapy Association. However, a close liaison and working relationship is assured by the structure of the Foundation. The membership of the Foundation is made up of the Executive Board of the American Occupational Therapy Association. The membership of the AOTF, in turn, elects a board of directors at least two-thirds of whom must be members of the Foundation (Executive Board, AOTA). This liaison assures that the Foundation knows and acts upon the needs of the profession.

Today

The Foundation is now activating itself. Committees have been established to develop the criteria upon which applications for Foundation funds will be evaluated. A panel of experts is being organized to recommend actions to the board of directors upon specific applications. Financial advisors are being sought in order to recommend effective investment of Foundation funds. Funds previously held by the Association to be used for educational and charitable purposes are being transferred to the Foundation at the direction of the Delegate Assembly. Plans are underway to announce the establishment of the Foundation to occupational therapists and friends of the profession via a brochure to be mailed in conjunction with the fiftieth anniversary of the AOTA.

The Foundation has already received contributions, bequests and memorials. Of particular note is the generous gift of Mrs. Carolyn W. Kohn of New York. Mrs. Kohn, an occupational therapist, contributed thirty thousand dollars to be used for occupational therapy scholarships.

The board of directors has been developing policies for both the receipt and disbursement of funds which are unrestricted in their use in order to preserve the advantages of flexibility and pooling of resources.

Tomorrow

In the future, the Foundation will be engaging in fund-raising campaigns and other activities designed to increase its resources. It will soon provide application forms for those who desire Foundation support. Until then, written narrative requests for modest amounts of financial support will be accepted. Such requests or requests for information about contributions or bequests should be forwarded to Frances Helmig, O.T.R., Executive Director, AOTF, 251 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10010.

The establishment of the American Occupational Therapy Foundation is an exciting step toward greater professional development in occupational therapy. Such development will ultimately create many benefits for our society. On this occasion of our fiftieth anniversary we pay tribute to those leaders of our association who had the creative vision and knowledge to give birth to a new idea. The idea can be further developed through the contribution of every occupational therapist. No amount or no suggestion is too small.