INCREASING DIVERSITY IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN NORTH CAROLINA

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RATIONALE FOR INCREASING DIVERSITY

• Health disparities for multiple minorities, low SES, rural:
  o Lack of access to care (geographical, financial, health literacy)
  o Bias/discrimination/stereotyping in care contexts, including by providers
  o More likely to receive sub-standard care and/or be discharged in unstable condition
  o Language barriers
  o Social stigma

• Lack of diverse perspectives on OT education, research, and practice

• Lack of upward mobility for minority and low-income individuals
CONTEXT: STATE LEVEL
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS

- Multiple rural areas in NC significantly underserved by OT
- Percentage of minority OTs dropped by .3% between 2011 and 2018, from 7.9% to 7.6%
- Percentage of minority OTs does not represent the population of NC, which is approximately 30% non-white (including 22.2% African American and 9.6% Hispanic/Latino)

(Retrieved from: https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/NC)
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSISTANTS

- Statewide shortages of OTAs are similar to those for OTs, although there are more OTAs working in rural areas than OTs, and the percentage of minority OTAs is higher (10.8%).

- However, the percentage of minority OTAs does not reflect the overall minority population of NC.
EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN N.C.

- 5 accredited entry-level Master’s programs (2 of which are currently applicants for conversion to entry-level doctorate: OTD)
- 2 additional programs in applicant status to develop entry-level OTD
- 2 programs in Candidacy status for developing entry-level OTD
- 9 accredited OTA programs at the Associate’s level
- 2 OTA programs at Applicant status for Bachelor’s level

Bottom line: there are growing educational options for those pursuing OT in NC, but many of these may have increased demands on students’ time and financial resources. The outcome of this may be decreased opportunities for those coming from rural, minority, or low-income backgrounds.
CONTEXT: PROFESSIONAL LEVEL
PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT

• There continues to be a significant push by some to re-introduce a motion for the OTD as a single point of entry to AOTA’s Representative Assembly.

• Despite the decision for dual points of entry for both OT and OTA that was just finalized in April 2019, there is already a motion entitled “Single Point of Entry for Occupational Therapists” submitted by the Missouri representative to the AOTA Representative Assembly on 8/29/19.

• Among the concerns voiced by those against the OTD as the single point of entry is the effect it could have on the number of applicants to OT programs from under-represented minorities and those from low SES backgrounds.
As an inclusive profession, occupational therapy maximizes health, well-being, and quality of life for all people, populations, and communities through effective solutions that facilitate participation in everyday living.

**Pillars:**

- **Effective:** Occupational therapy is evidence based, client centered, and cost-effective.
- **Leaders:** Occupational therapy is influential in changing policies, environments, and complex systems.
- **Collaborative:** Occupational therapy excels in working with clients and within systems to produce effective outcomes.
- **Accessible:** Occupational therapy provides culturally responsive and customized services.
- **Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity:** We are intentionally inclusive and equitable and embrace diversity in all its forms.

Of interest is that this was added after the rest of the statement was written and was not originally included.

https://www.aota.org/AboutAOTA/vision-2025.aspx
CONTEXT: NATIONAL LEVEL
NATIONAL CONTEXT

• H.R. 3637: Allied Health Workforce Diversity Act
  • intention is “to create legislation to provide grants to increase opportunities for individuals who are from underrepresented backgrounds, including students from racial and ethnic minorities, in the professions of occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech-language pathology, and audiology.”
  • It is a part of H.R. 2781: Educating Medical Professionals and Optimizing Workforce Efficiency and Readiness for Health Act of 2019.

College Affordability Act (H.R. 4674) includes (among other things):

- Tuition-free community college (opponents say this takes choice away from students as it funds an institution rather than an individual, and may force students to go into programs they really don’t want in order to afford it)
- Increase to Pell Grant awards
- Rescinds ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated students
- Requires Government Accountability Offices investigation of socioeconomic and racial gaps in higher education
- Subsidized loans for Graduate education
- For more information:
Higher Education Act (2008; up for potential re-authorization)

• Positives: expand Pell grants, creates emergency grants for students, preserves SEOG, work/study, public service loan forgiveness; in-school interest subsidies; limits on for-profits that seek to convert only their educational programs to not-for-profit

• Negatives: Federally established benchmarks with which accrediting bodies (like ACOTE) would have to comply; disagreement between political parties about continued funding for HBUCs

• If not re-authorized, the 2008 version of the Act stays in place

• For more information:

https://www.aacrao.org/advocacy/issues/higher-education-act
AOTA RESOURCES

While helpful, these resources are mostly about cultural competency, rather than about increasing diversity and developing equitable and inclusive educational and work environments.

AOTA on Multicultural Issues and Resources

- Position Paper: Occupational Therapy’s Commitment to Nondiscrimination and Inclusion – pdf
- Diverse and Inclusive Membership – AOTA Policy D.4 - pdf
- Advisory Opinion on Cultural Competency and Ethical Practice

Multicultural Networking Groups

The Multicultural, Diversity, and Inclusion (MDI) Network is a network of independent groups of various diverse identities and affiliations based on race/ethnicity; disability; sexual orientation; and religious affiliation that collectively support the increase of diversity and inclusion in occupational therapy.

- Asian/Pacific Heritage Occupational Therapy Association (APHOTA)
- National Black Occupational Therapy Caucus (NBOTC)
- Network for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns in Occupational Therapy (The Network)
- Network of Occupational Therapy Practitioners With Disabilities and Their Supporters (NOTPD)
- Occupational Therapy Network for Native Americans (OTNA)
- Orthodox Jewish Occupational Therapy Chavrusa (OJOTC)
- Terapia Ocupacional para Diversidad, Oportunidad, y Solidaridad (TODOS) Network of Hispanic Practitioners

Cultural Competency Toolkits

Explore the toolkits created by the Multicultural Diversity and Inclusion (MDI) Network: Resources for understanding the specific values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors associated with different cultural groups.
OTHER RESOURCES

COALITION OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ADVOCATES FOR DIVERSITY

https://www.cotad.org/

AHSPIRE

Allied Health: Strategies to Promote, Inspire, Recruit, and Educate

https://www.ahspireproject.com/
METHODS IDENTIFIED IN RESEARCH AND OTHER PROFESSIONAL LITERATURE

• High school outreach
• Pipeline programs
• Mentorship programs
• Accelerated curricula

(For references/resources, please contact Linn Wakeford at linn_wakeford@med.unc.edu)
DISCUSSION & BRAINSTORMING
DISCUSSION & BRAINSTORMING

If we want to increase diversity in OT in NC:
• What do we need to know?
• Who do we need to ask?
• What do we need to do?
• Who can help us?
RESULTS SUMMARY

• **Organization**: There is a need for some type of state-wide organization of efforts; centralized tasks may include maintaining a volunteer database, developing methods and materials for involvement of OTs in health and career fairs at various levels and to do high school outreach activities, and partnering with diversity initiatives in other Allied Health professions.

• **Academic**: Engagement of faculty, students, and alumni in community outreach activities, mentoring, and pipeline development; need for education for faculty and students around implicit bias, supporting diverse students, and working with diverse colleagues; need for administrative support for diversity/inclusion activities.
RESULTS SUMMARY

• **Community Outreach:** Multiple targets for outreach to introduce OT to children were identified, including schools and after-school programs, Boys’ and Girls’ clubs, camps, sports teams, and doing events at public libraries; the need to educate parents so they can support kids to explore OT was also identified; other ideas including educating active duty military about OT as a career option after they end their military service, and using venues in which OTs are already volunteering as a place to introduce/advocate for OT; the need to recruit from among high performing college students considering law, medicine, other professions also was identified

• **Funding:** The need to consider and find resources for student funding for OT education was noted repeatedly
THANKS...

• To all those who attended the workshop and contributed to the brainstorming and discussion process - the open sharing of ideas, strategies already being used, and interest in the issue was inspiring and hopeful!

• To the NCOTA Conference Committee for accepting this presentation for conference and giving us the space to have this discussion