

# Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Nancy Rentfrow

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## Introduction

This life history is one of 29 life history interviews which are part of a larger project, *Life Histories of Individuals Who Have Been Influential in Developing Occupational Therapy (OT) in North Dakota and Wyoming*. The purpose of this project is to gather information about the history and evolution of occupational therapy (OT) practice in North Dakota and Wyoming through life histories of individuals who have been influential in developing OT in these two states. It is anticipated that the life history process will be a powerful way to gather this information. This study is intended to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists a view of history and how occupational therapy practice has evolved from its inception to current practice in North Dakota and Wyoming.

## Description of Participant

Nancy Rentfrow is a retired occupational therapist and instructor of occupational therapy who currently resides in Erie, CO.

- 1973 - Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy from the University of North Dakota
- 1974 - Occupational Therapist in Adult psychiatry – Chicago, IL
- 1975 – Senior Occupational Therapist, Low Back and Pain Program – Chicago, IL
- 1979 – Occupational Therapist, Drug and Alcohol Program – Chicago, IL
- 1983 – Assistant Director of Occupational Therapy - Grand Forks, ND
- 1991 - Developed private practice in Grand Forks, ND focusing on medical case management for workers compensation clients.
- 12 years experience as a Rehabilitation Consultant to industry.
- 13 years as an instructor and guest lecturer for the University of North Dakota Occupational and Physical Therapy departments.
- In her last years as a practicing OT, Nancy worked as a medical care manager for the railroad industry, finishing her OT career in the work environment where she found her niche as an OT.

## Literature Review

- Based on the participant's time in practice, a literature review was completed comparing the shifts in practice with her personal turning points. The first decade of her career was marked by a shift in professional identity, as occupational therapy moved from depending on other professions for visibility to becoming a stand-alone practice in certain areas (Reed & Peters, 2008).
- In 1983, North Dakota finalized the requirement for state licensure (Archives – State Agencies – Board of Occupational Therapy Practice), beginning to change the structure of the profession as well as the requirements for therapists.
- For industry rehabilitation, on-site job analysis and therapy seems to be used less than clients visiting clinics due to increased costs. As therapists become more familiar with a particular industry's job requirements and environment, they complete fewer on-site visits and analyses (Lysaght, 2004).

## Methodology

The study completed was qualitative and researchers used a life history approach to elicit turning points within the participant's career. The participant was assigned from a list developed by the course instructors through a purposive sampling method. There were no specific gatekeeper issues as initial contact was made by course instructors. Informed consent was provided to and completed by the participant.

The semi-structured interview was guided by an interview schedule prepared by the course instructors; the questions on the interview schedule were designed to be used with all the individuals interviewed as part of the larger project. The researchers were allowed to modify or add interview questions as needed for each specific interview. Overall, the interview was guided by the Kawa model, allowing for an in-depth look at the participant's career and life turning points, and factors that promoted and impeded progress.

The data collection process involved requesting the participant's CV over email and reviewing it prior to the interview. The interview itself allowed for gathering qualitative data about the participant's life history related to her OT career. The interview was completed in 90 minutes and took place over video conference between the researchers in Grand Forks, ND and the participant in her home in Erie, CO.



## Data Analysis & Findings

The interview was transcribed verbatim and codes were created and collapsed into categories and themes. Trustworthiness was established using verbatim transcription, peer reviews, two researchers coding, cross-checking data with the participant's CV and keeping a reflexive journal throughout the research process.

### Education

- Importance of OT/PT collaboration
- Emphasized work environment in teaching career

### Time in Practice

- Gathered meaning and skills throughout career that led to many accomplishments
- Private practice was hallmark of career

### Environment

- Support systems influenced success
- Context influenced personal and professional identity

## Discussion

**Assertion:** For Nancy, personal and professional social supports, and work in industry rehabilitation shaped her professional identity and led to her success in creating her private practice, which was the hallmark of her career.

During the first decade of her career, a shift in professional identity occurred as occupational therapy moved from depending on other professions for visibility to becoming a stand-alone practice in certain areas (Reed & Peters, 2008), which allowed for greater options of where Nancy could practice. The ability for occupational therapy to be a stand-alone practice enabled her to later start her own private practice. Support systems from her time as a practitioner and educator in North Dakota also enhanced Nancy's ability to kickstart her own private practice providing rehabilitation to individuals in the work force.

In 1983, as North Dakota finalized the requirement for state licensure (Archives – State Agencies – Board of Occupational Therapy Practice), Nancy moved from Chicago, IL to begin her practice in North Dakota as an assistant director of occupational therapy at the Medical Center Rehabilitation Hospital in Grand Forks. Her professional identity was enhanced at that time as she became a licensed practitioner.

Another turning point in Nancy's career involved the use of on-site job analysis within the work environment. Although on-site job analysis seems to be used less due to increased costs and practitioner familiarity (Lysaght, 2004), Nancy stressed the importance of using the client's natural environment to provide the best services to get them back to work. This passion for rehabilitation within the work environment carried over into her teaching career, as it was reflected in the courses she taught. Overall, Nancy's time as an occupational therapist saw several shifts in the profession, which challenged her career but ultimately enhanced her professional identity.

## References

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