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Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Fred Sammons, PhD (Hon), OT,

FAOTA

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Abstract

Objective: The purpose of the life history study of Fred Sammons, OT, is to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists a view of the history and how occupational therapy (OT) practice has evolved from its inception to current practice through the life history stories of occupational therapists who have held leadership roles at the national level and beyond. It is anticipated that the life history process will be a powerful way to gather this information.

Method: An in depth, semi-structured, 70-minute interview was conducted at the Goodstein Foundation Library on the campus of Casper College via ZOOM due to Mr. Sammons being located in Michigan. The interview was then transcribed verbatim and coded by the two researchers and collapsed down into four categories with four corresponding themes for each.

Results: The categories that arose in this study were the contribution to OT, development of OT, professional journey, and networks. The findings indicate that Mr. Sammons' contributions of adaptive equipment will forever impact the field of OT.

Conclusion: Mr. Sammons developed into his role of an OT through the education he received and professional journey he encountered. His education and experiences influenced the development of his role of a businessman in inventing gadgets for the profession of occupational therapy. The impact his business has had impacts the profession globally, which leads to his connections and knowledge of networks at the international level.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists a view of the history and how occupational therapy practice has evolved from its inception to current practice through the life history stories of occupational therapists who have held leadership roles at the national level and beyond. It is anticipated that the life history process will be a powerful way to gather this information. The participant for this life history was Fred Sammons. The information that was obtained from Mr. Sammons was gathered in a semi-structured interview via ZOOM. The researchers had the privilege of interviewing Mr. Sammons from the Goodstein Foundation Library at Casper College, while he was at his home in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Fred Sammons is one of the top 100 Influential People of Occupational Therapy awarded by the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA). He created a business that was focused on the creation of adaptive equipment, which is now called *Sammons Preston*. Mr. Sammons supports research, education, and clinical programs by generously giving back through grants, scholarships, and donations. The information obtained in this interview provided insight from Mr. Sammons' perspective of how the profession of occupational therapy evolved on the national level.

Literature Review

As the profession of occupational therapy progressed during the World War II (WWII) era, the profession was using a rehabilitative model and biomechanical frame of reference as their domains. The major influence on this was soldiers returning home from the war. Occupational therapists had to address orthopedic, neurological, and psychiatric conditions on returning soldiers (McColl, et al., 2003). The military saw how productive their wounded

soldiers were after occupational therapy services and allowed occupational therapists on the front lines. The department of defense announced that occupational therapists could enlist in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps on November 6, 1943 (McColl, et al., 2003).

The rehabilitative model began after WWII and reached its highest peak in the 1970s after the creation of Medicare and Medicaid (Ivantfc, 2019). In 1946, the Hill-Burton Act provided federal aid for the development of rehabilitation centers. Specific rehabilitation services required services that were integrated, which included medical services (occupational and physical therapy), as well as psychological, social, and vocational services (Ivantfc, 2019). This movement of rehabilitation embedded occupational therapy into the medical model.

As Mr. Sammons continued his educational career and began his career in occupational therapy, 20 OT programs were beginning and the length of university programs increased from two years to four years between the years of 1950 and 1970 (McColl, et al., 2003). Mr. Sammons graduated with his degree in occupational therapy from Virginia Commonwealth University and obtained his first job in the profession in 1957. In 1958, AOTA took responsibility for educational programs for certified occupational therapy assistants. Baccalaureate programs were used and modeled for the standards of this new program's accreditations. This new program was created to alleviate the demand of occupational therapists, who were now required to attend four to six years of schooling (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2019).

Theory

The Life History project was guided by the Kawa model throughout, as it focuses on the different turning points, the flow, and barriers in one's life. The model is designed to help occupational therapists view the client in a holistic manner, as it focuses on the contexts that shape and influence the realities and challenges of a person's day-to-day life (Iwama, Thomson,

& Macdonald, 2009). The Kawa model uses a metaphor of a river and the items within a river to guide the occupational therapist and client to understand the contexts that are affecting the client's occupational performance. Rocks within the river represent obstacles and challenging circumstances, driftwood symbolizes subjective attributes that can influence the client's life both positively and negatively, the river side-walls and bottom/floor represent the physical and social environment, and the waters flow in the space between obstructions and the size of the space between the river side-walls represents the flow of one's life energy (Wada, 2011).

The Kawa model has a strong focus on culture, which is why it played an important role in guiding the Life History project. Each person is viewed holistically as part of a broader picture, while taking into account the client's many contexts rather than looking at each individual part separately (Leadley, 2015). The Life History project was designed to look at the profession of occupational therapy as a whole throughout the life of each participant's contributions and how the profession has evolved within the United States and around the world. Each participant interviewed played a role in the development of occupational therapy. The smaller things each participant contributed to came together to help shift and evolve the larger piece, which is the profession of occupational therapy. The Kawa model was an appropriate choice to guide the development of the Life History project.

Description of Participant

The information gather for this section was obtained through the interview with Fred Sammons. Mr. Sammons grew up on a farm where he learned how to handle and use different types of tools which then assisted him in learning how to handle different types of machinery and equipment. He began his professional career by teaching a mechanical drawing course for high school students for one year. Mr. Sammons first heard about occupational therapy through a

dating experience with a girl, Sue, as she was attending nursing school. He indicated that he would often attend education sessions that Sue was participating in, and at each session the head of Sue's program would discuss information about occupational therapy. After he taught the mechanical drawing course for a year, he served as a member of the Army in the Korean War for two years; he participated as a draftsman at a chemical center which worked on napalm gas for the war. When Mr. Sammons finished his military career, he obtained his occupational therapy degree from Virginia Commonwealth University through the GI bill. His first professional job as an occupational therapist began at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago. He became the head of the department in 1957 after three years of working there.

After a few short years of working as an occupational therapist, Mr. Sammons joined the staff of the amputee clinic at Northwestern University in 1960. This is where and the time that Mr. Sammons began designing adaptive devices to assist individuals with disabilities in their everyday occupations. Mr. Sammons made the decision in 1965 to devote all of his time in his professional career to creating, manufacturing, and distributing his interventions. In the interview, Mr. Sammons indicated that he worked seven days a week on his business, and that is a major reason why his business has been successful. Because of his success in creating and implementing gadgets for clients, he was awarded an honorary doctorate in occupational therapy through the Western Michigan University of Occupational Therapy, because they recognized the many contributions he has made to the profession.

Mr. Sammons supports research, education, and clinical programs by generously giving back through grants, scholarships, and donations. He is also a member of AMBUCS, Inc., which is a program designed to assist children with disabilities by providing adaptive bicycles and tricycles (AmTrykes). The American Occupational Therapy Foundation (AOTF) created an

award, dedicated to him in 2017, titled the *Fred Sammons Volunteer Recognition Award*. He was the inaugural recipient of this award. Mr. Sammons is an honorary life member of AOTF and is the first and only living million-dollar donor to the foundation.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study using a life history approach. The participant was selected from a participant list compiled through purposive sampling by the project directors. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interview and the project was reviewed by the UND Institutional Review Board and because of the study design the formal IRB process was waived. There were no gatekeeper issues as initial contact was made by the project directors.

The semi-structured interview was guided by an interview schedule prepared by the project directors; the questions on the interview schedule were designed to be used with all the individuals interviewed as part of the larger project. The student researchers were allowed to modify or add interview questions as needed for each specific interview. The researchers spent two hours gathering background data on the participant prior to the interview. Data was gathered through a video interview via ZOOM which lasted one hour and ten minutes.

Occupational therapy practice within qualitative research is considered to provide valuable sources of evidence (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). Trustworthiness of this study was utilized through multiple data collection methods. Member checking was used through the background information that the researchers obtained and followed up through the questions that were asked to the participant in the interview. The participant's responses helped in establishing credibility of the results. The researchers developed an audit trail through the analysis process to gain trustworthiness. Mr. Sammons was given a copy of the poster that the researchers emailed to him to ensure that the results of the study were correctly portrayed. During the interview, reflective

notes were used to assist in this process and also were effective in developing the follow-up paper. This process helped ensure that the codes, categories, and themes emerged correctly. These methods indicated that the project displayed strong reliability and validity.

Data Analysis

The interview with Mr. Sammons was video recorded, audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, and initially coded; the two researchers identified 20 codes during this process. Next, the researchers identified four categories that emerged from the codes throughout the interview. Four themes were then found that fit within each category. A final assertion and sub assertion were created based on the results; see appendix. The researchers reviewed the transcription and visual data display several times to gather a more in-depth perspective of Mr. Sammons' experiences and thoughts. The Kawa model guided the data analysis as it helped the researchers identify turning points in Mr. Sammons' life as well as identifying the assets and barriers of his experiences. This method helped the researchers gain a better understanding of the experiences and work Mr. Sammons completed for the development of occupational therapy and adaptive equipment.

Results

Fred Sammons's life experience and impact on the profession of occupational therapy and clients has been reflected in a positive manner. The process of data analysis and coding resulted in four different categories; which are the contribution to OT, development of OT, professional journey, and networks. Mr. Sammons' life experience in the profession of occupational therapy influenced the development of the corresponding themes that the researchers have identified for each category. The information that is provided below reflects the timeline and experiences that Mr. Sammons identified throughout his career.

Contribution to OT

Theme 1: Fred got a chance to use his talents to make gadgets early in his career.

This opportunity arose when he received his position at the amputee clinic at Northwestern University. As he began his career in the amputee clinic, he was treating patients and administering his practice, and then got the opportunity to go into prosthetic research. Mr. Sammons indicated, “we had a VA grant study to study prosthetics at Northwestern University in Chicago, and we were in the basement of the rehabilitation institute buildings.” He portrayed that this grant study had a major influence on the success of his career. This process led to the development of artificial limbs with many different types of motors and sensitivities.

Theme 2: The inventions Fred created provided choices for many clients.

When Mr. Sammons found an adaptive equipment device to be successful, he would make replicas of different colors and sizes. Mr. Sammons noted, “when it turned out to be okay, I made a good, better, best, and small, medium, large in red, white, and blue.” This allowed more clients to use the adaptive devices Mr. Sammons was developing.

Theme 3: Fred’s ability to problem-solve led to the development of many different adaptive devices.

This problem-solving ability is a result of his background and how he grew up. Mr. Sammons grew up on a farm and had to develop problem-solving skills at an early age. Mr. Sammons noted, “well when you grow up on the farm, there was a rule that if you broke it you had to help fix it. You didn’t have to fix it, but you had to help fix it.” This process showed Mr. Sammons what a hard work ethic was like, and to not quit when things are not going as planned. This experience and skills that he gained had a major influence on the impact that he has brought to the profession of occupational therapy.

Theme 4: Fred's business had a great impact on OT and adaptive equipment.

His business of creating, manufacturing, and distributing gadgets has had a heavy influence on the profession. Clients who have disabilities have been allowed to increase their independence through the use of his adaptive equipment. When Mr. Sammons began his business, in 1958 it was a mail order business; it is now a multimillion-dollar organization. His business is now titled *Sammons Preston*, which is an AbilityOne Company. Mr. Sammons is recognized as a member of the top 100 Influential People of Occupational Therapy and is an honorary member of the AOTF.

Development of OT

Theme 1: Fred's perspective on the growth of OT educations at Universities has been increasing rapidly.

Mr. Sammons' perspective on the growth of occupational therapy education at universities has been positive; he noted the rapid increase there has been on the amount of school that occupational therapy programs now require is generally positive. There were only about 30 schools that offered occupational therapy around the time that Mr. Sammons graduated with his degree. At that time, occupational therapy was only a bachelor's degree. Mr. Sammons stated while he had his business, "they were adding five schools every year for 20 years. So, there were a hundred new occupational therapy schools in 20 years, and when I think about my audience of buyers it expanded so much over those years." A majority of the occupational therapy programs today are of a master's degree level, though many of those universities are transitioning towards a doctoral degree. Mr. Sammons expressed shifting toward a doctorate degree was interesting, "Creighton University has been cranking out OTDs for almost 20 years. So, the record shows that they're effective in leadership over the long run, but just getting a few more hours from a

master's degree to a clinical doctorate doesn't make us a new person." Mr. Sammons expressed the importance of staying up to date with other healthcare professions but emphasized that does not make occupational therapists doctors. He has seen this with other professions as they move towards a clinical doctorate degree as those professions wear white coats and act as if they are doctors.

Theme 2: Fred's viewpoints on the impact of medical drugs may inhibit the OT partnership with clients.

He also expressed his concern with the impact medical drugs has had as it may inhibit the occupational therapy partnership with the client. While working at the state hospital Mr. Sammons mentioned:

They thought drugs were going to cure mental health and they didn't need occupational therapists anymore. Patients were just sitting there with their medicine being treated like zombies and didn't have any activities. Mental health people are discovering that they need occupational therapy. People need to feel like they belong and that they've got a purpose and so we need to shift back into a more gentle and less medication orientated world.

Occupational therapists continue to work in mental health settings and provide their clients with the best possible client-centered care as possible by also making the experience meaningful to the client with the activities chosen for them.

Theme 3: Fred expressed that client-centered care continues to be the standard of practice.

Client-centered care continues to be the standard of care as it has been since the beginning of the profession, which Mr. Sammons thought was one of the most important things within occupational therapy. Mr. Sammons stated, "I haven't practiced as an OT for a long time,

but I think OT is basically the same, it hasn't changed. We still have to be centered on the patient. We have to make our decisions as to what is good for the patient, try to help the patient."

Theme 4: Fred believed that OT is a versatile profession, with the ability to work in many different settings.

Occupational therapists have the ability to work with a wide variety of patient populations as well as in many different settings. Many occupational therapists change both whom and what they are working with many times throughout their careers. Mr. Sammons noted, "we don't always know what our path is going to be but it's an interesting career to be able to move around and do different things, I think it's quite flexible." Occupational therapists are able to work with students, hospital patients, hands, and all ages of people.

Professional Journey

Theme 1: Fred is the pioneer of creating adaptive devices for OT.

The amount of success that Mr. Sammons has obtained throughout his career is a reflection of the hard work and dedication he has put into the profession. He is a pioneer of creating adaptive devices for occupational therapy. As he was the first to develop adaptive devices, he had to experience a lot with trial and error. Technology was also not as advanced, which made this process difficult. Mr. Sammons stated, "when you're one of the pioneers you have to put up with that growth process."

Theme 2: Fred believed he was ahead and more advanced than his competitors.

Mr. Sammons expressed, "he started developing physical therapy equipment and then he began to do some OT stuff. But I was way out ahead of him, he could never catch up to me." The skills and abilities that he was comprised of allowed him to be successful in manufacturing his

interventions. He believes that his background had a major influence on what he was able to accomplish.

Theme 3: Fred used his skills and abilities to manufacture his interventions.

Mr. Sammons grew up on a farm where he was always needed to help with fixing different things. Making and fixing different things was something he expressed his enjoyment for. He stated, “I didn’t have business training, but I was successful because I guess growing up on the farm you learn to fix things and you’re in school you learn to similar way of doing.”

Theme 4: Fred received a broad education, which benefitted his career in OT.

Mr. Sammons received a broad education which benefitted his career in occupational therapy. He obtained his occupational therapy degree from Virginia Commonwealth University, and later obtained his honorary doctorate degree from Western Michigan University of Occupational Therapy. Mr. Sammons noted, “I was able to benefit from the education that I was given and incorporate that into my career. So, I think it was a broad education that I had, and I served the field for many years.”

Networks

Theme 1: Fred has been and continues to be involved in many state and national associations.

Mr. Sammons has been and continues to be involved in many state and national organizations. Mr. Sammons expressed, “I’ve been pleased to have those life memberships, and so some of them I’m more active than others.” When Mr. Sammons had his own business, he was involved with representative assemblies that would assist in leadership opportunities and would contribute to both AOTA and state associations. He is a lifetime member of the North Dakota, Michigan, and Illinois OT Associations, along with other states as well. A significant reason for his involvement in different state associations is due to the success he has endured in

his career and business. Mr. Sammons is a Lifetime Honorary member of the AOTF; the Fred Sammons Volunteer Recognition Award is named in his honor.

Theme 2: Fred is able to contribute to many organizations because of his successful career.

Mr. Sammons remains a member of many state and national associations, many of which he is greatly involved in. He supports research, education, and clinical programs by generously giving back through grants, scholarships, and donations. He is able to contribute to these causes because of his successful career and his multimillion-dollar business. Mr. Sammons stated, “Virginia Commonwealth where I did my training is building a nice new building, so I made a nice contribution there.” Mr. Sammons is also the first and only living person to donate a million dollars to the AOTF.

Theme 3: Fred often expresses advice to current and future therapists.

The advice that Mr. Sammons gave to the researchers was to choose a career path that you like and would have fun with. He expressed that the profession of occupational therapy is broad and allows for many different types of career paths and opportunities. Mr. Sammons indicated, “when you get in the hassle and you’re not enjoying the administration or the work you’re doing, don’t be afraid to turn and do something different. The world is full of need for therapists and you can change your emphasis if it turns sour for you.” This will allow future therapists the opportunity to turn and look in a different direction when they are not enjoying their specific setting or line of work.

Theme 4: Fred believes politics and government play a large role in impacting OT practice.

Occupational therapy is a profession that is strongly influenced by the government. There are many different things the government has an impact on such as, insurance, amount of OT services someone is able to receive, types of services the therapist is able to implement to the

client, and many more. Mr. Sammons explained how politics also affected his business by stating, “now at one time the government said that they weren't going to pay for gadgets in the nursing homes anymore. It would have devastated our business, but we had just published a big pediatric catalog and so we supplied pediatric equipment because the government had said they had to do work in the schools.”

Final Assertion: Fred developed into his role of an occupational therapist through the education he received and professional journey he encountered. His education and experiences influenced the development of his role of a businessman in inventing gadgets for the profession of occupational therapy. The impact his business has had impacts the profession globally, which leads to his connections and knowledge of networks at the international level.

Sub-Assertion: Fred had many experiences and through his abilities was able to be a pioneer for occupational therapy intervention.

Discussion/Conclusion

Fred Sammons has had a significant impact on the profession of occupational therapy. Though he only practiced as an occupational therapist for five years, he has still been acknowledged as one of the top 100 Influential People of Occupational Therapy awarded by the AOTA for the contributions he has had making and becoming one of the pioneers of adaptive equipment. Mr. Sammons continues to have a role within occupational therapy by being a member of many different national and state associations.

Mr. Sammons received his occupational therapy bachelor's degree from Virginia Commonwealth University in 1957, at that time, occupational therapy was strictly using the rehabilitation model for practice. This was because of the veterans returning from WWII made up the majority of the population occupational therapists were treating at the time (McColl, et al., 2003). Mr. Sammons' success with his interventions provided choices for the types and pieces of adaptive equipment clients could choose from. A strong influence on his business's success was

the life skills and abilities he gained earlier on throughout his lifetime from growing up on a farm, while also participating in education courses that built upon those skills.

Adaptive equipment was not as common at this time, and that is where Mr. Sammons knew his abilities could help many people. Mr. Sammons would notice a person struggling with an occupation and thought of different ways he could help that person by fabricating different adaptive devices. He began making gadgets on his own time at home one at a time and specific to an individual. Once the device seemed to be beneficial and working for that client, he would then make other devices similar but in different sizes for others to use when he noticed similar difficulties they were having as the original client. That is how Mr. Sammons began his business of developing adaptive equipment for clients.

Mr. Sammons continues to give back to the profession of occupational therapy by his active involvement in national and state associations. He remains most active with the AOTF and also generously gives back to the profession through grants, scholarships, and donations. Due to his donations to the profession, Mr. Sammons is able to award an individual with an award named after himself each year at the national AOTA annual conference.

The Kawa model guided the data analysis in this study as it helped the researchers identify turning points in Mr. Sammons' life as well as identifying the assets and barriers of his experiences. The barriers that Mr. Sammons experienced were based upon his capability in inventing adaptive equipment. Mr. Sammons is a pioneer in the creation of adaptive equipment and could not utilize his skills based on previous research or designs. During the time when he began inventing adaptive equipment, technology was not as advanced as it is today and frequently made this process difficult. He had to utilize many trial and error approaches to his interventions, this was because of the hard work ethic that was ingrained in him at a young age.

This method helped the researchers gain a better understanding of the experiences and work Mr. Sammons completed for the development of occupational therapy and adaptive equipment, as we were able to identify the flow and obstacles to his career in occupational therapy.

At the end of the interview with Mr. Sammons, he gave us advice as we are soon to begin our careers within the profession. He indicated that one of the reasons why he has such a passion for occupational therapy is because of the diversity that the profession allows. Mr. Sammons expressed that individuals need to be happy with their careers, and if they are not, they should turn and look in a different direction. The profession of occupational therapy allows therapists this unique opportunity and should always be considered when experiencing those types of situations.

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Appendix

Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Fred Sammons, PhD (Hon), OT, FAOTA
Dalton Fetsch, OTS & Jonah Kratochvil, OTS

Codes	Contribution to OT: Gadgets What being an OT meant Start business Reflecting Business	Development of OT: Careers in OT Need for OT OT struggle/growth OT practice/clinical reasoning Drug	Professional Journey: Education Got into OT Background Career start Prosthesis	Networks: Organizations Giving back OT professional involvement Advice Politics
Categories	Contribution to OT	Development of OT	Professional Journey	Networks
Themes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fred got a chance to use his talents to make gadgets early in his career. 2. The inventions Fred created provided choices for many clients. 3. His ability to problem-solve led to the development of many different adaptive devices. 4. Fred's business had a great impact on OT and adaptive equipment. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fred's perspective on the growth of OT education at Universities has been increasing rapidly. 2. Fred's viewpoints on the impact of medical drugs may inhibit the OT partnership with clients. 3. Fred expressed that client-centered care continues to be the standard of practice. 4. Fred believes that OT is a versatile profession, with the ability to work in many different settings. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fred is the pioneer of creating adaptive devices for OT. 2. Fred believed he was ahead and more advanced than his competitors. 3. Fred used his skills and abilities to manufacture his inventions. 4. He received a broad education, which benefitted his career in OT. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fred has been and continues to be involved in many state and national associations. 2. Fred is able to contribute to many organizations because of his successful career. 3. Fred often expresses advice to current and future therapists. 4. Fred believes politics and government play a large role in impacting OT practice.
Assertion	Fred developed into his role of an occupational therapist through the education he received and professional journey he encountered. His education and experiences influenced the development of his role of a businessman in inventing gadgets for the profession of occupational therapy. The impact his business has had impacts the profession globally, which leads to his connections and knowledge of networks at the international level.			
Sub Assertion	Fred had many experiences and through his abilities was able to be a pioneer of adaptive equipment for occupational therapy intervention.			