

Evaluation of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Thomas Fisher, PhD, OTR, CCM, FAOTA

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Introduction

Purpose Statement

- This life history is one of 30 life history interviews which are part of a larger project, *Histories of Individuals Who Have Been Influential in Developing Occupational Therapy (OT) at the National Level and Beyond*.
- The purpose of 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.

Dr. Thomas Fisher

Current Positions

- Dean and Professor of Health Sciences at Vera Z. Dwyer College of Health Sciences at Indiana University South Bend
- Governance of AOTA Review with AMC Consulting
- AOTPAC Ambassador

Past Positions

- Department of Occupational Therapy, Professor of OT & Chair at School of Health & Rehabilitation Indiana University, at IUPUI
- Adjunct Professor at School of Education – Indiana University at IUPUI campus
- Associate professor in the Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy at Eastern Kentucky University, College of Health Sciences
- Adjunct Associate Faculty of the Department of Preventive Medicine and Environmental Health University of Kentucky, College of Medicine
- Injury Prevention Specialist/Case Manager at Kindred Corporation
- Manager of Occupational Medicine Center and Director of Outpatient Therapy Services at Cardinal Hill Rehabilitation Hospital
- Supervisor of Occupational Therapy Services and Supervisor of OT, PT, and ST at Restorative Services Inc.
- Director of Therapy Services at Houston Companies
- Staff OT at Indianapolis Public Schools
- Manager of Rehab Services at Gateway Learning Center

Literature Review

- The passing of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 was a victory for occupational therapy (Reed & Peters, 2008) and opened the door for Dr. Fisher to obtain a job in the public-school system following his graduation.
- Between the years of 1972 and 1982, during the time Dr. Fisher was in the occupational therapy program, occupational therapists jumped from 10,981 to 25,754 following growing social consciousness regarding rehabilitation (Reed & Peters, 2008).
- In 1984 a statement by the Health Insurance Association of America issued a statement regarding the difference between OT and PT making OT more visible and reimbursable as a health care service (Reed & Peters, 2008)

Methodology

Participant Selection

- 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 approved by the UND Institutional Review Board and because of the study design the formal IRB process was waived.

Interview Schedule

- 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.

Data Analysis

A one hour and 18-minute interview was recorded via Zoom. The conference call was then transcribed verbatim by the students and initial thoughts and feelings were recorded. After transcribing the interview, 19 codes emerged and were divided into four themes. The Kawa Model was used as a guide for looking at major events that took place in the participant's career as well different aspects of his life that included obstacles and or turning points in his career (Teah & Iwama, 2015). The researchers used multiple data collection sources for their information regarding Dr. Fisher and world events. Throughout the data analysis process, the researchers established trustworthiness by reflective journaling to document the experience and biases to increase the reliability and validity of the study.

Findings

Occupational Therapy Politics

- Dr. Fisher was part of the initial licensure of several states and recognizes the importance of this in protecting the domain of occupational therapy practice.
- He emphasized the importance of being knowledgeable of legislative bills and ensuring reimbursement is consistent.
- Dr. Fisher recognizes the benefits to the profession from moving from bachelors to masters and indicates the doctorate will further the recognition of the profession.

Professional Journey

- Dr. Fisher stated that being awarded the AOTA Award of Merit and being voted a top 100 most influential occupational therapist was a very humbling and honorable experience.
- He has served on multiple committees and boards at the national level and served as vice president of the AOTA from 1998 to 2001. He views his role in these positions as being important in advocating for occupational therapy.

Occupational Therapy Practice

- Indiana University School of Medicine uses the COPM when having students practice multidisciplinary care for a patient.
- Through the use of participatory management style, Dr. Fisher emphasizes the importance of communication and explicit expectations of practice with multidisciplinary teams and when working with coworkers.
- He believes that using client centered practice to guide interventions for best care of patients is what sets occupational therapy apart from other medical professions.

Occupational Therapy Association

- The importance of membership in both the state and the national occupational therapy associations is fundamental to provide protection for occupational therapy's domain of practice.
- Dr. Fisher emphasized being involved in the national and state associations as a rewarding experience that students and practicing therapists should be involved in.
- Dr. Fisher recognizes that finding a mentor to help guide newcomers in the occupational therapy association will be beneficial to the organization and different leadership positions.



Photo courtesy of: Dr. Thomas Fisher, PhD, OTR, CCM, FAOTA

Conclusion

Assertion

- Dr. Fisher has used his leadership positions in practice settings, state associations, and at the national association to advocate for the profession; he has been a key participant in legislative efforts for the initial OT licensure in several states to protect the domain of occupational therapy practice.
- Dr. Fisher stressed the importance of being a member of the AOTA and state associations to help with the advocacy for OT practice and ultimately protecting the domain of OT.

Thank You

We would like to thank Dr. Fisher for his time and participation in this life history study. We enjoyed the experience to learn about an influential member in developing occupational therapy. We would also like to thank our instructors Dr. Janet Jedlicka and Dr. Gail Bass.

References

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