■ WFOT SYMPOSIUM IN THE 42nd JAOT, BUILDING AND REBUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH OCCUPATION

Global Community of Occupational Therapists

Kit SINCLAIR, PhD; WFOT Past President

Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Abstract: The World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT), with 65 country members, is a dynamic and proactive organization as demonstrated by the tremendous level of activity and project work presently taking place. Reflections on international involvements of WFOT as well as present and future global projects taking place within the WFOT are described.

Key words: World Federation of Occupational Therapists, global occupational therapy activities

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The World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT), with 65 country members, is a dynamic and proactive organization as demonstrated by the tremendous level of activity and project work presently taking place.

As we look toward the future, we must also reflect on the past few years that have been fulfilling and exciting. We have been able to accomplish a great deal through excellent teamwork and commitment to important development through projects. Areas of achievement for our team include smooth transition in management, major projects in Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR), human rights, and disaster preparedness and response. Relations with the World Health Organization (WHO) and other international and national

organizations have been extended by responding quickly to requests and by taking the initiative to advance WFOT and occupational therapy perspectives.

The WFOT is the international voice and representative of the profession in an ever-shrinking world. As the profession achieves greater recognition for its unique perspective on occupation and its power to make a difference in people's lives, there is an increased demand for our expertise and participation in the global community.

The Federation's continually increasing efficiency has resulted in a major expansion in international liaison activity. The WFOT is the key international representative of the profession and liaises regularly with WHO, United Nations (UN) agencies such as UNESCO and other international non-governmental organizations (NGO's).

In the last few years, these interactions have multiplied and the WFOT has developed even

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Corresponding to: Kit Sinclair, PhD, Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, Hong Kong Polytechnic University

e-mail: kits@pacific.net.hk

stronger working partnerships internationally. In 2006, WHO commended WFOT for its stellar participation in WHO initiatives in relation to WFOT triennial report on collaborative activities. As WFOT enters its 50th year as an NGO member of WHO, the high profile reflects increased awareness of the occupational therapy contribution to world health.

WFOT coordinates, facilitates and participates in the development and transfer of occupational therapy's knowledge and expertise for the international scene through its projects, through International Advisory Groups, and through personal contact in meetings and conferences. WFOT has embarked upon identifying and liaising effectively with its international experts through the International Advisory Groups.

WFOT is able to coordinate the profession's response to global health and wellness needs through participating in social and economic development initiatives. WFOT is aware of the relationship between poverty and disability and accepts the need for more integrated multi-sectoral approaches for all forms of development.

An example of this is in the WFOT responses in January 2006 and again in June that year, to Mental Health Guidelines and action sheets for the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on Mental Health (World Health Organization: IASC, 2007) and Psychosocial support in Emergency Settings. Another is involvement in the illuminating World Bank e-discussions on 'Disabled and other Vulnerable People in Natural Disasters' (World Bank, 2006).

The new management model enables more people beyond council members to participate in project teams. The Federation is undertaking in excess of 175 individual projects both minor and major in the last five years.

The Federation's projects are becoming more proactive, e.g. the Tsunami Project/Disaster Relief and Preparedness project—this initiative serves as the basis for the development of the WFOT Disaster Preparedness and Response Package (WFOT, 2007) which is now available to members through the WFOT on-line shop. WFOT is assuming the leadership role here in consolidating,

promoting and employing the profession's vast knowledge and expertise. This is to assist the international community in dealing with the ramifications and the aftermath of devastating events that impact on the fundamentals of human occupation. Major donations have substantially contributed to the ability of WFOT to make a significant response.

Strengthening engagement with government coordination and programming systems at national, district and local levels will be crucial to progressing successful Occupational Therapy involvement in Disaster Preparedness & Response initiatives. National workshops took place in the first half of 2006 in Indonesia, Thailand, and Sri Lanka, with members of the Executive acting as facilitators.

Occupational Therapy national action plans to address disaster preparedness and response have been drawn up and national task forces established in these countries. The regional and national workshops which resulted from this initiative will inform international actions.

The capacity building which took place at these workshops will support local therapists to contribute to disaster response e.g. the tragic Indonesian earthquake where Occupational Therapists and Occupational Therapy students are involved in recovery efforts. A culturally sensitive manual on disaster preparedness and response for occupational therapists has been produced.

This project which started in response to a major world emergency has developed into an initiative for future action to raise awareness to disaster and to prepare occupational therapists to be involved at all stages to re-engage people in meaningful occupations within their communities.

WFOT initiated a major project in human rights to address issues of human rights in relation to our profession. Integral to the work of occupational therapists is the right of all people to occupational engagement (participation), meaning a person's right to take part in necessary or meaningful occupations.

Within the human rights master project plan, two projects have emerged with prominence. One is 'voices of people with disabilities-consumer interface' which focuses on the involvement of

occupational therapy service consumers in the development of the future vision for occupational therapy. Another project 'Inclusive Occupational therapy Education' has been completed. Its team gathered data on access to admissions and access to learning in occupational therapy education program worldwide.

A discussion paper on human rights leading to a position statement from WFOT was in the works for over two years. The position paper on human rights ratified in 2006 was also developed over this period with much e-discussion as it is important to include global and cultural perspectives (WFOT, 2006). The position paper challenges the profession to address accessibility through universal design, to address health promotion needs of groups, communities and populations with a wider recognition of people's rights to meaningfully and purposefully occupied.

The project on 'Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) data collection and analysis' was very fruitful in establishing the extent and level of occupational therapy involvement in community based rehabilitation. The results of this project will provide a foundation for education modules, promotion of international fieldwork exchange programs and advancement of occupational therapy involvement in CBR around the world.

Major projects are also taking place in the support of development of professional services and education in both Egypt and Mongolia. The Egypt based project has really taken off. Regular newsletters have been published to promote coordination and collaboration between project members and a network of supporters. The newsletters were published on the WFOT website and stimulate a lot of international attention. Out of that project, two occupational therapy education programs have evolved in Egypt which are already admitting students.

Other projects include development of global competencies, translation of the WFOT glossary into Chinese, and many other areas which support the profession's continuing advancement. The number of successful projects has increased dramatically with individual members taking up leadership roles. We commend those who have volunteered their time and energy to these

noteworthy tasks.

Regional groups produce synergies through geographical proximity of conferences, workshops and consultations. An example is the regional conference of the Occupational Therapy Africa Regional Group (OTARG) in August 2005. The Occupational Therapy Latin American Regional Group (CLATO) held the VIth Latin-American Occupational Therapy Congress and XIVth Colombian Occupational Therapy Congress, also at the end of August 2005. The Council for Occupational Therapy in the European Community (COTEC) holds regular congresses, the past in Athens in September 2005 and the next in Hamburg in 2008. The Asia Pacific region (APOT) held their congress in June 2007.

The Japan Association of Occupational Therapy's Conference and WFOT Symposium held in June 2008 in Nagasaki are part of the continuing opportunity to share and develop occupational therapy for the 21st century.

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