AOTA Statement on Justice and Systemic Racism
5/31/2020

Like many in our profession, and much of society, we are part of a grieving America after watching the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis and other members of the African American community. We acknowledge and condemn the multifaceted aspects of systemic racism and oppression. We stand with occupational therapy practitioners and students in their expressions of pain, anger, and demands for change. The impact of systematic racism spans the history of our country. Today, we must address the fundamental issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion beyond conceptual factors.

What drives occupational therapy forward is our shared, passionate belief that everyone should be able to participate fully in everyday living. As a profession based on elevating strengths and eliminating barriers to occupational engagement for our clients in their day-to-day lives, we must use our expertise to identify and address the challenges facing the African American community and find meaningful solutions that will enable each member of society to thrive.

Justice is a core value of occupational therapy and the responsibility of all practitioners, as established in the AOTA Code of Ethics (2015). We must work not only to, “[develop and support] diverse communities … such that all members can function, flourish, and live a satisfactory life,” but we must endeavor to eliminate occupational injustice, occupational alienation, and occupational deprivation. Equity, inclusion, and diversity is a critical pillar of our Vision for the future, leading to an inclusive profession that maximizes health, well-being, and quality of life for all people, populations, and communities. The position paper Occupational Therapy’s Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion “affirms the right of every individual to access and fully participate in society,” and was developed collaboratively by the Commission on Practice (COP), the Commission on Education (COE), the Coalition of Occupational Therapy Advocates for Diversity (COTAD), and the Multicultural, Diversity, and Inclusion (MDI) Network.

As the AOTA Board of Directors, we are committed to expanding the work started earlier this year through AOTA's Diversity and Inclusion Task Force to find new and effective solutions to enhance equity and inclusion within our Association, our profession, and our society. More importantly, we will place recommendations into action. We will advance change at the systems level through AOTA’s Task Force on Population Health and AOTA’s Governance Enhancement Initiative.

Increasing diversity and inclusion within all aspects of occupational therapy—including practice, policy, education, research, and governance—requires partnership among our members, volunteers, staff, and other stakeholders. We must use our existing tools and training to facilitate occupational justice, to identify gaps, and to create opportunities. We must make changes for our individual clients, populations and system-wide to create the future we all long to see for people we serve, our colleagues, our profession our nation, and the world.

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