Abstract

The purpose of residency was to: 1). Explore demographics of the current membership of the Tennessee Occupational Therapy Association (TNOTA), 2). advocate for increased membership in state and national occupational therapy associations and 3). develop personal leadership skills. The Culminating Project was conducted in three phases. In Phase I data from the demographic survey administered to TNOTA members indicated that occupational therapy (OT) and occupational therapy assistant (OTA) students (combined) represented the smallest subgroup (15.1%) of the reporting membership. Respondents who had been practicing between 1-5 years were the largest subgroup to report that they did not plan to renew their membership. In Phase two, a review of the literature was conducted to explore ways to enhance professional development. Results indicated that being an active member of professional state and national associations, attending and volunteering at state and national conferences, working with a mentor, and networking with professional colleagues all contribute to one’s professional development. To share this information, a PowerPoint presentation was developed and piloted with two occupational therapy (OT) Programs and one occupational therapy assistant (OTA) program in the mid-Tennessee area. Based on feedback, a sustainable voice over PowerPoint was created then distributed to OT and OTA programs in Tennessee. Phase three included assisting with the creation of a Social Media Committee for TNOTA, helping to organize TNOTA Day on the Hill, and taking on the leadership role of a Co-Chair of the People Power Committee for the American Occupational Therapy Association’s 95th Annual Conference in Nashville.

Literature Review

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) Centennial Vision of 2017 states, “We envision that occupational therapy is a powerful, widely recognized, science-driven, and evidence-based profession with a globally connected and diverse workforce meeting society’s occupational needs” (2007, pg. 613). An extensive amount of literature has been written on how occupational therapists (OT) and occupational therapy assistants (OTA) can help to achieve this vision. Recommendations include contributing to evidence-based research, supporting state and national professional organizations, and actively advocating for the profession (Clark, 2012; Clark, 2011; Hubbard, 2005). Zachary and Flick (2015) suggest it’s important to realize individuals do not have to be in a formal position of authority to become a leader within the field. For example, prior to entering the field of occupational therapy, students can advocate for positive changes in service and delivery, which in turn contributes to the growth of the profession and promotes personal and professional growth as well. McClure (2011) reports that entrepreneurship has relevance and should be taught to occupational therapy students with a focus on acting, thinking, and behaving in an innovative manner. A review of the pertinent literature showed common themes related to professional growth. They included active involvement with professional state and national organizations, working with a mentor, networking, and attending national and local conferences (Mata, Latham, & Ransome, 2010; Lukes, 2010; Clark, 2012).

Justification of Need

“...you do not have to be in a formal position of authority to become a leader”

Phase I: Exploration

OT and OTA programs at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga, Belmont University, and Roane State Community College agreed to let Shelly Singh and myself share information we found in the literature that advocates for student involvement. In turn, this may increase student membership of TNOTA and encourage renewal of membership as future practitioners. A few slides from the PowerPoint presentation can be seen below.

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Reference