

Holistic OT Can Heal the Profession

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It has been three years since I began actively championing holistic approaches -- what are commonly referred to as complementary/alternative medicine (CAM) -- into OT practice. In that time frame I have spoken with hundreds of OTs from around the globe who have been inspired and grateful to see other OTs utilizing these approaches in their practices and for self-care.

Weekly, I receive several e-mails and phone calls from OTs, retired OTs, student OTs, and prospective OT students asking for guidance on how to incorporate holistic approaches into their practice. Many of them frustrated that their schools do not address these topics, although a very small number do. I suspect we will see these numbers increase in the coming years.

Many of the OTs I have spoken with share that they have felt isolated or alone in how they are practicing. Some have considered leaving the OT profession. Some have left the OT profession and would like to come back while integrating holistic care in their practice. Some are prospective students who are already trained in holistic approaches such as yoga and meditation, and they would like to bring their passion and skills with these approaches into the OT profession.

For many years, I felt isolated and alone as someone who was passionate about how holistic approaches can be helpful, but knew very few healthcare professionals who were trained in and incorporating them into their practice. Even though I worked in clinics, hospitals, SNFs, and TCUs, I often felt disconnected and somewhat of an outcast in the profession. It felt strange to me, because only 25% of what I was taught in school was being applied in mainstream OT practice. Treatment plans were often reduced to simple ADLs, which are important, but seemed to be missing the opportunity for deeper mind, body, and spirit healing that is at the root and foundation of OT philosophy.

I became interested in preventive care and having a deeper understanding of how the mind, body, and spirit influence each other for health and healing. I received education in many holistic approaches. I kept following my heart, intuition, the research available, and first-hand client outcomes. In the past 15 years I have seen more healthcare practitioners practice holistic care and continue to see the numbers grow.

A Holistic OT Community Grows

There is a trend toward utilizing these approaches. I have had the good fortune of helping to create a community for OTs who are interested in or currently practicing holistic approaches to connect, come together, share, learn from, and support each other. I am grateful to be part of a budding community of practitioners, including OTs, who are learning and practicing holistic approaches.

Having the opportunity to meet and share with others interested in this work is also very healing for me. It is also healing for our fellow OTs who have felt a bit disconnected from their vision of how an OT can be working. It is healing for our profession, because each individual OT is what

constitutes the profession. The more personal and professional satisfaction we feel, the more effective we can be with providing the best care to those we serve.

The numbers continue to grow and we are all feeling less alone. There is not an exact number as to how many OTs do incorporate holistic approaches into their practice. I have approached a couple of large OT organizations to complete a survey to reflect this, and was told that this was not a priority at that time. Maybe it doesn't really matter, because it is already happening, and will undoubtedly continue to grow.

Holistic OT as a Leader in Healthcare

I have also noticed more OTs are starting a private practice, and several tell me they are very interested in doing this. The way they would like to practice would include holistic approaches, and feel this would give them more freedom to practice their vision of how to best serve. For those who choose to stay in employed positions it is possible, and many are already providing holistic approaches, and appropriately documenting, billing for these services, and receiving reimbursement. holistic ot

The foundational guidelines of our profession support us to teach and guide our clients with mind, body, and spirit approaches that can get to the core of a person's illness by addressing all aspects of their being. This dovetails nicely into holistic approaches that, in most cases, are pejoratively referred to as CAM. OTs can be leaders in this emerging specialty in healthcare.

Holistic OT for Wellness and Prevention

While there are many rewards of seeing a person improve and reach their goals, working as a healthcare professional can be very stressful emotionally, psychologically, and physically. Several OTs have expressed feeling burned out and experiencing disillusionment with productivity standards and not being able to provide all of the care they would like to for their clients. Some have described a sense of professional alienation. This is, sadly, not too surprising as over 50% of all healthcare practitioners experience symptoms of burnout.

Holistic approaches are wonderful for a practitioner to incorporate into their lives for their own personal self-care. Meditation, yoga, guided imagery, and a host of massage and bodywork approaches can be very supportive for managing stress, staying healthy, and preventing illness. Eating well and getting enough rest and sleep are equally as valuable.

Holistic OT Transforms Healthcare

While studying, learning, and practicing holistic approaches I have used them for my own self-care, while simultaneously helping others. They have helped me follow my passion, keep me well, and heal any suffering that has been related to feeling "outside" of the profession. Looking back, I see how all of the things I have studied, all the experiences I have had in a variety of settings, and the personal and professional challenges have led me to assist healthcare and OT professionals to follow this wave -- to assist with the transition of how healthcare is being practiced.

I see now that the momentum is only increasing, and there will be a tipping point where all of the beneficial holistic approaches, also referred to as integrative medicine, will simply become part of healthcare.

All of healthcare is undergoing this transformation with the integration of holistic approaches. The research is staggeringly significant for most holistic approaches and it would be unethical to ignore the positive role they can play in health, healing, recovery, and prevention.

To learn more and connect with OTs interested in mind, body, and spirit medicine, prevention and wellness visit the www.HolisticOT.org website, the Holistic Occupational Therapy Page, Group on Facebook, LinkedIn, and HolisticOT on Twitter, and join the Holistic OT e-mail list.

Resources

CAM: Not So Alternative Anymore: Holistic Healing Research Supports Efficacy in OT Practice. Retrieved from: <http://occupational-therapy.advanceweb.com/Columns/Holistic-OT/CAM-Not-So-Alternative-Anymore.aspx>

Holistic Occupational Therapy: Complementary and Alternative Medicine is an Emerging Specialty Practice Area in the Profession. Retrieved from <http://occupational-therapy.advanceweb.com/Archives/Article-Archives/Holistic-Occupational-Therapy.aspx>

Over 50 Percent of Health Care Workers Report Symptoms of Burnout. Retrieved from: <http://thehiringsite.careerbuilder.com/2013/06/27/over-50-percent-of-health-care-workers-report-burnout/>

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