

Teachable Moments: Holistic Education in the OT Profession Continues to Evolve

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As more research demonstrates the positive effects of holistic mind, body, spirit medicine, and people are searching for more healing options beyond drugs and surgery, OTs need to become educated in holistic approaches and bring them to our clients. OTs are perfect for learning and expanding holistic approaches. OTs have always thought outside the box and have brought unique approaches to their clients. OTs look at the "whole person" and do a variety of techniques that assists individuals to engage in meaningful tasks and activities. Holistic approaches fit easily and comfortably within the OT scope of practice.

Holistic Health Care

The American Holistic Medical Association states that: "Holistic medicine is the art and science of healing that addresses care of the whole person -- body, mind, and spirit. The practice of holistic medicine integrates conventional and complementary therapies to promote optimal health, and prevent and treat disease by addressing contributing factors. Holistic healthcare practitioners strive to meet the patient with grace, kindness, acceptance, and spirit without condition, as love is life's most powerful healer.

In practice, this means that each person is seen as a unique individual, rather than an example of a particular disease. Disease is understood to be the result of physical, emotional, spiritual, social and environmental imbalance. Healing, therefore, takes place naturally when these aspects of life are brought into proper balance. The role of the practitioner is as guide, mentor and role model; the patient must do the work -- changing lifestyle, beliefs and old habits in order to facilitate healing. All appropriate methods may be used, from medication to meditation."

Holistic Trend

New research continues to demonstrate several health benefits, and our health care system is embracing holistic approaches that have formerly been known as complementary/alternative medicine (CAM). Across all health care professions there is a trend of practitioners becoming educated in holistic approaches and they are integrating them into their practices. Professionals are being trained in holistic approaches such as yoga, meditation, guided imagery, energy healing, nutrition, herbs, supplements, craniosacral therapy, massage therapy, reflexology, and acupuncture. These approaches have simultaneous effects on the mind, the body, and the spirit, and play an integral role in prevention and wellness.

The Holistic Research is In

There is sufficient data that has come out and continues to come out supporting many health benefits of holistic approaches. We know that guided imagery can empower individuals to have a better sense of control, can lower stress levels, boost immune system, and improve emotional well-being (www.belleruthnaparstek.com/hot-research/index.php).

We know that meditation can lower stress, anxiety, and depression, assist emotional regulation, improve self confidence, improve attention, and heal all the way to the genetic level (www.massgeneral.org/bhi/research/published.aspx and <http://psyphz.psych.wisc.edu>). We know that yoga and Ayurveda are complete sciences on how to live and manage emotions, thoughts, the spirit, and the physical body, and have a well-balanced life (www.centerforyogaandhealth.org/Evidence-Based-Yoga-Research.html).

We know that Traditional Chinese Medicine and QiGong have a long history with improving and maintaining health (www.jcm.co.uk). We know that a healthy diet full of nutritious rich vitamins with fresh fruits and vegetables can improve health and prevent many diseases and illnesses (<http://nutritionfacts.org>).

An OT's Holistic Education

When I began as an OT there wasn't the definite scientific link between stress and illness. There really weren't many research studies demonstrating the health benefits of massage therapy or meditation. During this time, I worked with older adults in nursing homes, home care, and transitional care units. I primarily worked with end-of-life issues. What I really wanted to do was to help people not become so ill. I became more interested in prevention.

I was drawn to learn more about energy healing and enrolled in a qigong energy healing course at a wellness center. This center provided natural health and wellness care -- chiropractic, massage therapy, herbs and nutritional counseling, acupuncture, energy healing, shamanistic, and emotional and spiritual healing. I was exposed to a whole other level of healing that was not taught in mainstream colleges.

I became the administrator for the QiGong Energy Healing School and manager to the wellness center. I completed a two year medical qigong energy healing training while going to school to become a massage therapist and reflexologist, and became nationally certified through the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork and the American Reflexology Certification Board.

I learned to develop and trust my intuition through my meditation practice, the energy healing training, and learning from an intuitive/spiritual teacher. It was a scary time as I felt like I didn't really know how or where I belonged in health care, but I kept following my inner knowing and my heart.

I took a break from mainstream OT and began my first business as a massage therapist and reflexologist. Then, I combined acupressure, massage therapy and reflexology at a skilled nursing facility/transitional care unit and documented and billed within OT sessions.

I joined the integrative medicine team at the Penny George Institute for Health and Healing at Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis. I provided energy healing, massage therapy, reflexology, and guided imagery. We worked with the most challenging people whose pain, stress, and anxiety were not responding to medications. The program expanded with many referrals from all over the hospital. Our team received training in guided imagery. I learned how to guide patients to experience the relaxation response and feel more in control, have less pain, stress, and anxiety, and recover more quickly. I taught reflexology, massage therapy, and energy healing to health care practitioners and caregivers.

I returned to private practice and began teaching intuitive development, relaxation, meditation, energy healing, and guided imagery courses and seeing clients one to one. I received additional training in craniosacral therapy, emotional freedom technique (EFT), and an interactive guided mindfulness meditation that processes emotions, thoughts, and energy through body sensations with unconditional love and acceptance for oneself called emotional clearing.

I began calling myself a holistic OT and blogging about all of these fabulous approaches and how it can be integrated into OT practice. Practitioners from all over the world contacted me and one of them was Mandy Lubas, OTR/L. We decided to write a column and submitted it to ADVANCE Magazine and it was so well received that we now have a monthly "Light on Holistic OT" column.

My mission now is to educate and support as many OTs and health care practitioners in these holistic mind, body, spirit, prevention, and wellness approaches and to integrate them into their practices, share them with their clients, and use them for self care.

What Approaches Will You Learn or Teach?

There is a need, for those of us who are interested, to learn these approaches and expand our skill set. Consider which holistic approaches draw your interest and become trained in whatever modality calls to you at this time. Would you like to learn to teach children or adults how to calm down with the relaxation response through meditation, yoga, or guided imagery? Would you like to nourish and enhance people's health with better food choices through healthier diet and nutrition? In what ways can you enhance your practice providing these approaches? Consider what areas would be fulfilling and which approaches are calling to you.

Once you have become educated and have enough experience you may find yourself wanting to teach continuing education courses. These approaches could also be easily taught at the university level in OT programs to continue to expand holistic education in OT practice.

Upcoming Holistic Education for OTs

There are more education opportunities coming up in which you can learn mind, body, spirit, prevention and wellness approaches. A unique professional development opportunity is happening Oct. 11. A one-day live webinar titled "Integrate Mind, Body, Spirit Medicine into Your Practice: Holistic Care and Strategies for Adults and Children" features six OTs presenting and exploring topics such as the science of mind, body, spirit medicine, yoga, meditation, nutrition, the spirit and joy of service, and raising consciousness in health care. To learn more visit www.wakeuptowhoyouare.com/oct-11-webinar-integrating-mind-body-spirit.html.

To connect with other OTs interested in and practicing holistic approaches and to learn more, join us once a month for our holistic OT phone conversation. Ask to join the e-mail list at emmy@emmyvadnais.com to receive updates on holistic OT. Please "like" our Holistic Occupational Therapy Facebook Page and join the conversation online at the Holistic Occupational Therapy Group page on Facebook or LinkedIn and visit the www.holisticot.org website. We look forward to connecting with you!

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