

## Report to Ad Hoc Committee for Future of OT Education

### *TOPIC: INCREASING FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH*

Joan Rogers, Joy Hammel, and I met by conference call on Monday to discuss the Ad Hoc Committee's request to give recommendations on increasing occupational therapy's access to federal funding for its research. (Mary Lawlor reviewed this proposal and provided comments.) We talked about the context for this effort as putting more emphasis on graduate education (PhD students), post doctoral fellows and our faculty scientists who we know have skills that need to be supported as they compete for and train students to function in a complex federal funding environment. We see the recommendations we are making to your ad hoc committee to be efforts that need to be coordinated with the AOTF to build the infrastructure to insure the continuing success of our mid career scientists and those they are mentoring, which in turn will provide the evidence base for occupational therapy practice.

Joy Hammel, Mary Lawlor and I were at the Occupational Science Summit and were pleased to observe over 40 mid-career occupational therapy scientists who had brought about 30 PhD students who are in training to become career scientists. This experience and a review of Joan Rogers' Report to the Board in 2005 are reflected in the following 4 categories that have yielded 14 recommendations. Thank you for the opportunity to make recommendations.

#### **1. Develop a networking infrastructure to provide funding resources, education, and mentoring opportunities for our mid-career scientists (many of whom are our educators in research intensive and extensive universities) and their mentees.**

We see a very active role for AOTA and AOTF research staff to build social capital for our career scientists. There must be an active environmental scanning process to identify federal research priorities that have relevance to occupational therapy researchers.

*Recommendation 1:* We would suggest that the research staff of both organizations take an active role in leading a bi-monthly discussion with the RAP or Academy of Research members to learn of the opportunities that the scientists are picking up in their interactions with colleagues and agencies, and get them out quickly and efficiently to the network of OT junior and senior researchers. This information can be used by the staff as they interact with federal agencies and disseminate information to a career science network (such a network will be discussed below).

*Recommendation 2:* Utilize OT mid career and senior scientists (e.g., RAP, Academy of Research) to enculturate graduate students and junior scientists to the funding process by discussing their career trajectories and the strategies they are using to obtain funds (federal and private). Design and implement webinars to be held two times per year and made available on a web page long term (e.g., a panel of mid-career scientists discussing funding challenges and strategies for sustaining their laboratories). Mary Lawlor led a similar panel at the OT Summit and it was well received and provoked wonderful questions and discussions.

*Recommendation 3:* Federal project officers (e.g., Ralph Nitkin at NCMRR, Ruth Brannon at NIDRR) should be asked to do annual webinars to educate junior scientists on the range of funding mechanisms and processes offered by their funding source; these would be focused on constantly educating incoming scientists on what is available and how to proceed in applying and getting into this network formally. Another webinar could focus on federal research priorities and new initiatives and priorities, including potential interdisciplinary and collaborative initiatives in which OT's could participate. Having such webinars would link all levels of OT researchers (junior and senior) with current initiatives and opportunities, both within and outside of OT.

## **2. Develop infrastructure for national-level network for mentoring doctoral and post-doctoral students and junior/early career researchers.**

It is important to have an infrastructure and technology to support a strong network of career scientists, postdoctoral, and doctoral students on a career scientist trajectory so junior scientists can learn from senior scientists and senior scientists can discuss advanced methodologies and research opportunities with each other that will yield federally funded work.

*Recommendation 4:* Build or contract for someone to construct an electronic network to support our career scientists. Such a network would require criteria for admission to the network so it was reserved for those who are seeking federal/research foundation funding and have protected time for their science. New scientists will enter this group; it will not be a static group but instead a group that is constantly dialoguing and networking. The success of such a network will be partially dependent upon the ability to build and maintain a database of key researchers, their research programs, and funding sources.

*Recommendation 5:* Build or contract with someone to build such a database to identify and house data of key career scientists and developing scholars who are conducting research in occupational therapy and interdisciplinary areas and who may not have academic appointments in occupational therapy education programs.

*Recommendation 6:* Recognize and validate systematic mentoring by senior scientists in some way, perhaps paying an honorarium to scientists to do a rigorous external review of a grant before submission.

*Recommendation 7:* Develop senior researcher mentoring awards to better recognize time and effort involved in mentoring young scientists.

*Recommendation 8:* Sponsor a senior panel of scientists to perform mock reviews of federal grant proposals (building a professionally funded ERIS-type of seminar), which would include senior researchers external to OT as reviewers, as well as senior OT panel members, so that junior researchers can get feedback from members likely to be on a review panel who may or may not be familiar with OT or OT research.

## **3. Develop more strategic alliances with inter-disciplinary research efforts that could include OT's but currently do not.**

*Recommendation 9:* Host a meeting of PhD program chairs who are preparing research scientists to discuss issues such as how to prepare students for post-doctoral fellowships in related, interdisciplinary fields (e.g.,

aging, community health, neuroscience, rehabilitation science, disability studies), as well as challenges in obtaining training monies, recruitment, and many more issues.

*Recommendation 10:* Ask our senior scientists in aging, neurorehabilitation, technology, pediatrics, and chronic disease to identify key common data elements (CDE) initiatives, including those that are to be included in NIH studies (PROMIS, NIH TOOL BOX) and NIDRR's initiatives to support their long range plan, and to integrate OT constructs and mechanisms into these CDEs so there are crosswalks between OT and rehabilitation research. Such an effort would give us a common voice to add OT to interdisciplinary and multi-site studies. This could be done on network chats.

*Recommendation 11:* AOTA and AOTF research staff should foster communication among OT's that are currently serving on study sections and review panels to provide strategies for expanding the representation of OT career scientists on study sections and review panels.

#### **4. Translate our fundamental theories into specific intervention protocols**

*Recommendation 12:* Sponsor an initiative to build consensus on identifying key mechanisms involved in change within OT research so we develop shared language, research, and measurement (can be a product of a career scientist network). It may be time for a program similar to physical therapy's that has section meetings at which scientists and senior clinicians interact. We believe that such a structure would begin to build consensus on mechanisms, measures, and language by providing the time for the dialogue that scientists are asking for. Such a meeting would address recommendation 13 below.

*Recommendation 13:* Foster discussion of senior clinicians and career scientists to build the infrastructure for multi-site trials and OT's involvement within them (in and outside of OT).

*Recommendation 14:* Build a formal Dissemination and Knowledge Translation Plan that engages AOTA in using print, practice guidelines, conference and continuing education opportunities to engage OT practitioners in translating and use research findings within their own practice.

Respectfully submitted,

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