

November 12, 2009

Susan M. Wilczynski, Ph.D., BCBA
Executive Director, National Autism Center
Chair, National Standards Project
41 Pacella Park Drive
Randolph, Massachusetts 02368

Dear Dr. Wilczynski:

I am writing on behalf of the American Occupational Therapy Association, which represents the interests of 140,000 occupational therapy professionals in the United States, including researchers, educators, and practitioners. We have recently had the opportunity to review the National Standards Report issued by the National Autism Center. As a result of that review, I wanted to share with you what we believe to be valuable information to support and validate the theory and practice of sensory integration.

AOTA has supported a number of systematic reviews as part of the Association's Evidence-Based Practice Initiative. The goal of the project is to promote evidence-based occupational therapy practice through a variety of dissemination efforts, including publication of the results in peer-reviewed journals and on AOTA's website, and incorporation of the findings into our Occupational Therapy Practice Guidelines.

The results of the systematic review *on interventions used in or of relevance to occupational therapy in children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder* was published in the July/August 2008 issue of the American Journal of Occupational Therapy (Case-Smith, J. & Arbesman, M., 2008). The findings from the review have also been included in the Occupational Therapy Practice Guidelines for Children and Adolescents with Autism (Tomchek, S.D. & Case-Smith, J., 2009).

Forty-nine articles were included in the systematic review of occupational therapy interventions used in or of relevance to occupational therapy. The results of the systematic review were summarized within the following categories: sensory integration and sensory-based interventions; relationship-based interactive interventions; school-based programs; social skills interventions; and, comprehensive behavioral interventions. Within the framework of sensory integration and sensory-based interventions were touch-based interventions, with evidence from two randomized controlled trials. In contrast, this evidence is reported to be emerging by the National Autism Center.

We also wanted to inform the National Autism Center that AOTA has conducted an evidence-based literature review on the topic of occupational therapy for children and adolescents with difficulty processing and integrating sensory information. A series of focused questions served as the basis of this review and covered available knowledge on intervention, neuroscience, and occupational performance (e.g. performance and participation in daily life activities). Summaries of the results of the focused questions have been completed and are posted on AOTA's website. Manuscripts have been accepted for publication in a 2010 issue of the American Journal of Occupational Therapy.

The practice of sensory integration has been supported by the development of numerous AOTA-sponsored resources and activities. At present, there is a variety of Specialized Knowledge and Skills Papers, Fact Sheets, Frequently Asked Questions as well as journals, manuals, and other continuing education products related to occupational therapy and sensory integration. An AOTA sponsored Sensory Integrative Special Interest Section Committee leads the development of quarterly articles, conducts a business meeting and presentation at the yearly AOTA National Conference, and manages a Sensory Integration related listserv on an online Occupational Therapy forum.

Families indicated their value of occupational therapy in the study conducted through the Interactive Autism Network, an innovative online project located at the Kennedy Krieger Institute in Baltimore, Maryland, which is funded by Autism Speaks. Tens of thousands of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, mothers, fathers, and siblings are already registered. It may interest you to know that occupational therapy is one of the most highly regarded treatments among the IAN families, second only to Speech and Language Therapy. Sensory Integration Therapy, which is listed separately, is currently the sixth most popular treatment. The Interactive Autism Network published a report on the use of occupational therapy by nearly 2,400 families participating in the IAN Project, and can be found at:

http://www.iancommunity.org/cs/ian_treatment_reports/occupational_therapy

The profession of occupational therapy focuses on "activities ...of everyday life, named, organized, and given value and meaning by individuals and a culture." According to the AOTA Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: *Domain and Process*, 2nd edition, sensory-perceptual skills are demonstrated "through actions or behaviors that a client uses to locate, identify, and response to sensations and to select, interpret, associate, organize, and remember sensory events based on discriminating experiences through a variety of sensations that include visual, auditory, proprioceptive, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, and vestibular." This modulation and interpretation of sensation for meaningful activity is an integral component inherent to the theory and practice of occupational therapy and sensory integration, and may not have been fully articulated in the definition of SI package utilized in your study.

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The Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC)'s Strategic Plan for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Research recognizes that some people with ASD have difficulties processing sensory input, and acknowledges occupational therapy as an intervention. Specifically the research plan states: "Occupational therapy can improve functioning in everyday activities (e.g., eating, bathing, and learning) as well as sensory integration."

In conclusion, AOTA supports the work of its members who provide occupational therapy intervention using a sensory integration approach. It is our belief that there is value in sensory integrative practices to enhance the lives of some individuals with disabilities such as autism and that emerging research is helping to validate its efficacy. We believe it unfortunate that the National Standards Report of the National Autism Center did not include valuable research findings available regarding occupational therapy and sensory integration. We bring this to your attention in hopes that there will be other opportunities to highlight the relevant research cited in this letter, and we would be most willing to assist you in identifying relevant research in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Penelope Moyers Cleveland".

Penelope Moyers Cleveland, EdD, OTR/L, BCMH, FAOTA
President

Case-Smith, J., & Arbesman, M. (2008). Evidence-Based Review of Interventions for Autism Used in or of Relevance to Occupational Therapy. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 62, 416-427.

Tomchek, S.D. & Case-Smith, J. (2009). Occupational Therapy Practice Guideline for Adolescents with Autism. Bethesda, MD: AOTA Press.