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2007 OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY MONTH: RESTORING THE LIVES OF WOUNDED WARRIORS

***“We try to treat the entire person – mind and body.”
– LTC Stephanie Daugherty, Walter Reed Army Medical Center***

(Bethesda, MD)—As advances in battlefield medicine save more soldiers’ lives than ever, the science of occupational therapy is providing rehabilitation that allows America’s wounded warriors to return to full participation in life. April is Occupational Therapy Month and The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) is shining the spotlight on this important work performed by military practitioners.

“Our soldiers are subjected to an increasing array of injuries that requires innovation in their rehabilitation treatment,” said AOTA President M. Carolyn Baum, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA. “The profession of occupational therapy is meeting those challenges in military settings around the world.”

Though the vast majority of military occupational therapy practitioners are in the Army, they also serve in the Navy (which is responsible for Marine care) and Air Force. These men and women serve both in the United States and in military theaters such as Iraq and Afghanistan. The injuries these practitioners treat include, but are not limited to; post-traumatic stress disorder, poly-trauma (multiple serious injuries from one event) amputations and brain injuries. Walter Reed Army Medical Center provides treatment with over 2000 patient visits per month. The types of treatment vary depending on the injury and the rehabilitation program can last for up to one year.

“The goal of our therapy is to maximize soldiers’ independence in basic living skills to returning them to their military jobs or transition to civilian life,” said LTC Stephanie Daugherty, Chief of the Occupational Therapy Department at Walter Reed. “These activities can include learning how to button a shirt with a prosthetic arm to military-specific activities such as assembling and cleaning a weapon. Whenever possible, we return these soldiers to serve with their units and as of now, 62 service members with single limb amputations have been returned to active duty military service.

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LTC Daugherty is proud of all the therapy programs provided at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. These programs include; in-patient rehabilitation, upper extremity orthopedic rehabilitation, amputee care, and out patient behavioral health. "All these programs are activity based", LTC Daugherty states "engaging patients in activity based therapy helps integrate functional skill for independent living "The process of engaging clients in therapeutic activity as well as exercises helps restore fine and gross motor skills," said Daugherty. "Thinking skills such as planning and problem solving are also strengthened. "We try to treat the entire person."

Soldiers also go through training in "Fort Independence", a home-like setting within Walter Reed that features a living room, bed, kitchen and bathroom. Here soldiers relearn how to do everyday activities such as dressing, bathing, home maintenance and cooking a meal. "These are real-life activities that we all have to do," added Daugherty. "Relearning these skills fosters independence."

AOTA will continue to highlight military practitioners at its upcoming annual conference in St. Louis, MO, April 20-23, 2007. The keynote speaker has directly benefited from occupational therapy provided by military practitioners. *Time* Senior Correspondent Michael Weisskopf was on assignment in Iraq, riding in the back of a U.S. Army Humvee, when an insurgent grenade landed on the seat next to him. He picked it up to throw it out of the vehicle, and by doing so, saved himself, the *Time* photographer with him, and four soldiers. But he lost his right hand in the attack. Weisskopf was sent to the amputee ward at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, the first reporter wounded in combat ever to be treated there.

"Today's therapy being provided by military practitioners will pay great dividends for our society," added Dr. Baum. "The advances we are seeing in rehabilitating the injured will further the understanding of the vital relationship between occupation and wellness. AOTA is proud to claim military practitioners as part of our profession. We thank them, and every soldier, for their important service to our country."

About the American Occupational Therapy Association

Founded in 1917, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) is the nationally recognized professional association of approximately 35,000 occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, and students of occupational therapy. AOTA advances the quality, availability, use and support of occupational therapy through advocacy, education and research on behalf of its members and the public. For more information, visit us on the Web at www.aota.org.

About Occupational Therapy

Occupational therapy is a proven, recognized therapy that enables people to overcome the disabling effects of mental, physical, developmental, and emotional conditions by helping improve their ability to perform tasks in their living and working environments. Practitioners work with individuals to improve their basic motor functions and reasoning abilities, and also to compensate for permanent loss of function. The goal of occupational therapy is to help individuals lead independent, productive and satisfying lives through participation.

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