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OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS REMIND STUDENTS TO “PACK IT LIGHT, WEAR IT RIGHT” TO AVOID DISCOMFORT

Former AOTA President Brings Backpack Awareness to Iceland

(Bethesda, MD) — As students begin returning to school, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) gears up for National School Backpack Awareness Day on Wednesday, September 17, 2008. Annually, occupational therapy practitioners and students hold special events in communities throughout the country to educate students on the proper way to wear a backpack and how much weight to carry.

Although studies show six out of 10 students ages nine to 20 report discomfort attributed to backpacks, proper homework management skills can help students learn to pack only what they need. Experts recommend a loaded backpack weigh no more than 15 percent (about one-sixth) of a student's body weight (i.e., for a student weighing 100 pounds, this means the backpack should weigh no more than 15 pounds). However, three out of 10 students typically carry backpacks weighing up to one-third of their body weight at least once a week.

Occupational therapy looks at the best ways for people to accomplish their goals. Backpacks are just one issue for students. Following are several tips offered by AOTA to help students achieve in school, including managing their homework, as well as lightening their backpacks:

- Have the student write all assignments down in a planner. Too often, students think they have memorized all of their assignments and end up missing a few. Keeping the list of assignments organized and complete can reduce the stress of trying to figure out what is missing. Parents should review the list daily.
- Urge your child's school to implement a password-protected Web site or message board where parents can monitor a student's assignments. By using these systems, parents can help students plan exactly which books and materials to bring home.
- Provide a consistent environment where homework is completed. Doing homework in a different place every day or in cluttered spaces doesn't provide much-needed order and structure.

Dr. Karen Jacobs, EdD, CPE, OTR/L, FAOTA, provided an overview of the present evidence-based research on ergonomic issues faced by students at the 40th annual Nordic Ergonomic Society conference of the Icelandic Ergonomics Society on August 12. Modeled after AOTA's successful National School Backpack Awareness Day, Iceland has held its own backpack awareness events since 2005.

“In recent years, both in the U.S. and internationally, students have been carrying increasingly heavier backpacks, which not only hold school essentials, but also often include notebook computers, MP3 players and heavy water bottles,” said Jacobs, an occupational therapist, former AOTA president and a board certified professional ergonomist. “Carrying heavy backpacks or wearing them incorrectly daily may cause discomfort to the body.”

For more information about National School Backpack Awareness day, visit
http://www.promoteot.org/AI_BackpackAwareness.html.

Founded in 1917, the **American Occupational Therapy Association** (AOTA) represents the interests and concerns of more than 36,000 occupational therapists, assistants and students nationwide. The Association educates the public and advances the profession of occupational therapy by providing resources, setting standards including accreditations and serving as an advocate to improve health care. Based in Bethesda, Md., AOTA's major programs and activities are directed toward promoting the

professional development of its members and assuring consumer access to quality services so patients can maximize their individual potential. For more information, go to www.aota.org.