

Keeping Current

Using Journal Tables of Contents To Locate Evidence

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Coming up with new ways to solve persistent problems with clients is a theme that runs throughout occupational therapy regardless of the setting, population, or area of practice. Brainstorming with colleagues at work or attending local, state, and national conferences provide excellent opportunities to learn about innovative client-centered interventions that occupational therapy practitioners are creating every day to help individuals participate more fully in their lives. Persistent problems, however, sometimes require casting a wider net to find practice-relevant information and research evidence.

One dilemma that may arise is finding enough time in a busy schedule to locate research evidence for the interventions used in practice. The ideal scenario is to find the best, most up-to-date information in the shortest amount of time. Occupational therapy practitioners are not alone in this quest. A recent study indicates that convenience is one of the key factors in patterns of journal reading by pediatricians.¹ In addition, the top two reasons for reading a journal article are (a) to get information about treatment and (b) to develop an awareness of research literature that is currently available. With the Internet at our fingertips, there are shortcuts to finding the most recent articles that are published in your areas of interest—possibly related to the practice issues you find most puzzling.

The first step is to find the names of journals that provide information about your area of practice. Although the *American Journal of Occupa-*

The following are sources of open-access, full-text articles:

- PubMed Central: www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov
- BioMedCentral: www.biomedcentral.com
- Directory of Open Access Journals: www.doaj.org
- Find Articles: www.findarticles.com
- HighWire Press: <http://highwire.stanford.edu>

tional Therapy covers the broad spectrum of occupational therapy, other journals target specific areas of practice. These can be found by searching the Internet to combine the practice area with the term “journal,” consulting with a research librarian, or asking coworkers for suggestions.

You can then find evidence quickly and conveniently by using the Internet to connect to electronic journals and scanning their tables of contents related to your area of practice. In less than a minute, you can get a sense of what is new and available, what applies to occupational therapy, and what articles could be evaluated for their potential use as evidence. In addition, journals with electronic access maintain an archive of past issues, complete with article abstracts that can also be reviewed.

The tables of contents of two recent journal issues provide a wealth of this type of information. The first, the November 2007 issue of the *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*, has articles relevant to occupational therapy, with several providing evidence to inform clinical practice. These include a randomized controlled trial of splint use and exercise for persons with carpal tunnel

syndrome,² and a pilot study of the use of a Segway as an alternative mobility device for persons with disabilities.³ Also included is a systematic review on access to postacute rehabilitation services.⁴ The journal can be found at www.archives-pmr.org/home.

The *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* provides citations for evidence for those working in the area of mental health.

Through the home page (www.bu.edu/cpr/prj) you can access the table of contents of the current issue; click on “Browse Archive Online” to explore past issues. Listed in the archives is a special issue, “The Health Promotion of People With Psychiatric Disabilities,” published in spring 2006. Articles of interest to occupational therapy practitioners are a nonrandomized controlled trial of a weight loss program for persons with psychiatric disabilities⁵ and a randomized controlled trial of oral health promotion programs for persons with psychiatric disabilities.⁶

After a quick review of article citations and abstracts, you can then move on to article retrieval. Although not all journals offer free full text online, most offer free abstracts, and some provide an option to purchase individual articles. In addition, many can be accessed through college, university, and medical center libraries. If you do not have privileges to use these resources, some college alumni associations offer online library access as a member benefit, making it easy to tap into electronic journals for which the school has a subscription.

Checking in with journal Web sites to seek current and archived tables of

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contents is a routine worth establishing. By using this process, regardless of your area of practice, current and targeted evidence is only a click away. ■

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