



**STATEMENT OF THE
AMERICAN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH,
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE
ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
FOR THE HEARING**

**“Improving America’s Health: Examining Federal Research Efforts for Pulmonary
Hypertension and Chronic Pain”
December 8, 2005**

On behalf of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), I would like to submit the following statement for the record in response to the Energy and Commerce’s Subcommittee on Health hearing on “Improving America’s Health: Examining Federal Research Efforts for Pulmonary Hypertension and Chronic Pain.” AOTA represents nearly 36,000 occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, and students of occupational therapy to promote the interests of the profession and patients.

Occupational therapy is a health, wellness, and rehabilitation profession working with people experiencing injury, illness, or disabilities, including pulmonary rehabilitation and chronic pain management. It helps people regain, develop, and build skills that are essential for independent functioning, health, and well-being. Occupational therapy is provided in a wide range of settings including day care, schools, hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, home health, outpatient rehabilitation clinics, psychiatric facilities, and community programs. Occupational therapy professionals assist those with traumatic injuries—young and old alike—to return to active, satisfying lives by showing survivors new ways to perform activities of daily living, including how to dress, eat, bathe, cook, do laundry, drive, and work. By providing strategies for doing work and home tasks, maintaining mobility, and continuing self-care, occupational therapy professionals can improve quality of life, speed healing, reduce the chance of further injury, and promote productivity and community participation.

Pulmonary Hypertension

Occupational therapists often work with patients diagnosed with respiratory diseases, such as pulmonary hypertension (PH). PH is a serious and often fatal condition where the blood pressure in the lungs rises to dangerously high levels. In PH patients, the walls of the arteries that take blood from the right side of the heart to the lungs thicken and constrict. As a result, the right side of the heart has to pump harder to move blood into the lungs, causing it to enlarge and ultimately fail. Those who suffer from PH experience shortness of breath, fatigue, dizziness, chest pressure or pain, and swelling in the ankles, legs, and abdomen. The effects of these symptoms can cause individuals quality of life to suffer dramatically, making them unable to perform many of their activities of daily living.



Occupational therapists work in consultation with other health professionals to develop individualized programs for patients diagnosed with respiratory disease. These programs are designed to improve pulmonary function, and achieve maximum relief of breathlessness, fatigue, and pain. In the more advanced stages of PH, the patient is able to perform only minimal activity and exhibits symptoms even when resting. Specific rehabilitation regimens have been used by occupational therapists to increase functional capacity in patients with pulmonary disease by increasing their ability to perform activities of daily living through changes in the environment or routines. Occupational therapists can help patients identify and modify their behaviors and activities to help them cope with some of the symptoms associated with PH. Occupational therapists' education provides them with unique skill set, making them capable of treating those who suffer from conditions that can decrease their quality of life, and ultimately help them achieve the highest level of satisfaction and independence in their life.

AOTA agrees with the findings in the "Pulmonary Hypertension Act of 2005" (S. 1774/H.R. 3005) that detail the need for expanded federal investment in PH and increased coordination among the national research institutes at the National Institutes of Health to fully take advantage of the potential to find better treatments, therapies, and a cure for PH.

Chronic Pain

More than 130 million Americans suffer from chronic, or frequently occurring, pain. Chronic pain creates both physical and psychological problems that affect whether a person can engage in meaningful activities each day. Pain can decrease a person's strength, coordination, and independence in addition to causing stress that may lead to depression.

With the help of occupational therapy, people with chronic pain can learn to manage the physical and psychological effects and lead active and productive lives. Many people with chronic pain have already received treatment with medication, surgery, heat, cold, nerve stimulation, and massage. What many have not yet learned is how management of daily activities and lifestyle can contribute to successful, long-term coping with pain.

Occupational therapists can identify specific activities or behaviors that aggravate pain and suggest alternatives. They also can teach methods for decreasing the frequency and duration of painful episodes, and implement therapy interventions that may decrease dependence on or use of pain medications. Occupational therapists facilitate the development of better function for daily activities, and teach those suffering from chronic pain how to use adaptive equipment to decrease pain while performing tasks such as reaching, dressing, bathing, and performing household chores. Occupational therapists can help clients gain a sense of mastery over their pain through recognizing maladaptive pain behaviors, providing physical treatment options, encouraging cognitive restructuring, and other psychosocial strategies.



The American
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*Occupational Therapy:
Skills for the Job of Living*

AOTA is in full support of the “National Pain Care Policy Act of 2005” (H.R. 1020) that is aimed at declaring adequate pain care research, education, and treatment as national public health priorities. AOTA has signed a consensus statement prepared by the American Pain Foundation in support of H.R. 1020 intended to bring awareness to the pain care community and highlight the need to for our congressional leaders to legislatively support pain care research, education, and treatment.

Chronic pain is a serious problem that should not go untreated. Chronic pain has been an under-addressed area of study, yet it is an epidemic that affects between 25% and 30% of Americans. Occupational therapists have a unique approach to the treatment of chronic pain because of their training in both physical and psychosocial dysfunction. A holistic approach places the therapists in an excellent position to treat the multifaceted aspects of chronic pain. Occupational therapists consider the impact of chronic pain on occupational performance, emphasizing pain’s effects on functional ability to work, leisure, and activities of daily living.

Finally, AOTA commends the Subcommittee on taking the time to learn more about pulmonary hypertension and chronic pain. Congress is in a great position to support and move forward legislation that seeks to educate, research, and find better treatments and therapies for pulmonary hypertension and chronic pain. AOTA looks forward to working with Members of Congress and other provider groups on these important issues.

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