

# Occupational Therapy in Mental Health

## **Improving independence and functional performance for people with mental illness.**

The foundation of occupational therapy is firmly rooted in psychiatry and was developed by a psychiatrist engaging in activity-based therapy during the early 1900s. The profession has been guided by a holistic approach to therapy with an emphasis on psychosocial factors that affect human function. Occupational therapy brings a collaborative rehabilitation approach to mental health treatment in keeping with the recent trend toward increased emphasis on recovery and functionality.

Occupational therapists are included as mental health professionals under Medicare regulations, are designated in some states as qualified mental health providers, and have long been employed in institutions and other settings that serve people with mental illness. The transition from institutional care settings toward community-based care changed the role of occupational therapy related to mental health practice. Action is necessary to return access to the contributions of occupational therapy to the mental health field in the new and improved paradigm.

## **Issue**

Occupational therapy is not listed in federal law and regulation as a core mental health profession and, because of that, is often not included in legislation and programs related to mental health. AOTA is working to reclaim the position of occupational therapy as a primary service for people with mental illness and seeks to work in collaboration with Congress and other stakeholders to expand the role of occupational therapy in mental health treatment.

## **Mental Health Parity (H.R. 1424/S. 558)**

The Paul Wellstone Mental Health Parity Act of 2007 (H.R. 1424) was introduced in the House by Representatives Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) and Jim Ramstad (R-MN). Senators Kennedy (D-MA) and Domenici (R-NM) introduced S. 558. The bipartisan legislation has built a majority of co-sponsors in the House for the past three consecutive Congresses. AOTA joins over 360 national organizations that fully support passage of mental health parity. *AOTA believes that now is the time to pass mental health parity.*