OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN MENTAL HEALTH
Occupational Therapy’s Distinct Role in Mental Health Services

- Serious mental illness can have a devastating impact on the basic skills that are needed for day-to-day, independent functioning. The purpose of occupational therapy in mental health is to increase an individual’s ability to live as independently as possible while engaging in meaningful and productive life roles.

- Occupational therapy practitioners work with clients to establish goals related to improving participation in one’s home, school, workplace, and community.

- They teach and facilitate skills in the areas of problem solving, medication management, home and community safety, social skills, activities of daily living, vocational and leisure interests, stress management, and more.
Occupational Therapy and the Path to Independence

- Many states are under Olmstead settlements with the Department of Justice, requiring that people with mental illness live and be treated in the least restrictive environment and, when appropriate, moved out of institutional settings.

- One of the barriers to achieving independence for people moving out of long-term, institutional settings, is a lack of ability to complete activities of daily living (self-care, medication management, etc.) independent activities of daily living (community mobility, cooking, grocery shopping, etc.) and to structure their time in a way that promotes positive mental health.

- Occupational therapy practitioners are specifically trained to address these barriers to independence.
Occupational Therapy in Mental Health Act

- The bill be introduced this year by Rep. Paul Tonko (D-NY) and Rep. Mike Kelly (R-PA). We are seeking supporters in the Senate and cosponsors in the House.
- The bill amends the National Health Service Corp to include Occupational Therapists under the definition of “behavioral and mental health professional”
Why is it important for occupational therapy to be added to the NHSC?

- Adding occupational therapy to the National Health Service Corp would help expand access to occupational therapy services by encouraging new occupational therapists to practice in mental or behavioral health, in high needs areas, through loan forgiveness.

- Additionally, NHSC designation of occupational therapy as a mental and behavioral health profession would serve as a guideline for states and other federal programs, when they are defining qualified mental health professionals, and what mental health professional are eligible to participate in a given program.

- The National Health Services Corps (NHSC) appears to be the only place in Federal Law where the term “behavioral and mental health professionals” is specifically defined.
Mental Health Liaison Group letter of support

• The other professions currently eligible for loan forgiveness as mental and behavioral health professionals either openly support our inclusion or have agreed to remain silent.
• This support is very rare, but other professions understand the unique role of OT in helping people with mental illness.

Mental Health Liaison Group

May 15, 2012

The Honorable Paul Tonko
422 Cannon House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Tonko:

The undersigned organizations in the Mental Health Liaison Group are writing to express our support for the Occupational Therapy Mental Health Act, H.R. 3762.

The mental health and addiction workforce — already insufficient to address current needs — will soon be faced with additional challenges given the expansion of health coverage under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), six to ten million uninsured persons receiving health insurance via the ACA’s coverage expansions will have diagnosable mental health or addiction disorders. Of this patient/consumer population, private actuarial studies estimate that more than 2.5 million newly insured individuals will have such severe mental illnesses that they will be served primarily through the nation’s public mental health system.
Budget Neutrality

- The version of the bill to be introduced this year (included in your packet) includes “trigger language”.
- This “trigger language” says that occupational therapists will not be able to participate in this program until the overall funding for the program is increased.
- This ensures that the bill is “budget neutral”.
Limited to Mental Health Professionals Shortage Area

- Many people worry that this bill would open up the entire National Health Service Corp (there are many professionals that would like to be added).
- For this reason it is important to note that the only OT’s who would be eligible for participation are ones practicing in a Mental Health Professional Shortage Area, the majority of OTs would not be eligible. (see one pager for more details)
Federal Recognition of the Role of OT in Quality Mental Health Care

- Last spring, Congress passed the Excellence in Mental Health Act, which will establish Certified Community Behavioral Health Centers (CCBHCs) in 8 states.
- This demonstration project is a first step to ensuring quality mental health services for people with mental illness.
- The draft criteria were released this February.
- Occupational Therapists were included in their draft staffing criteria.
- The new centers can choose from a list of professionals, including OT.
- Note: the 8 states have not been selected; in early summer the final criteria will be released and states may apply for planning grants.
Federal Recognition of the Role of OT in Quality Mental Health Care

- CMS has established Conditions of Participation for Community Mental Health Centers under Medicare Partial Hospitalization.
  - These require:
    - Occupational therapy be a part of the interdisciplinary team
    - OT needs be considered in the initial evaluation
    - OT be provided when evaluation says it is appropriate
    - OT be offered to all clients of the CMHC regardless of payer

- SAMHSA recently released their new round of Primary Behavioral Health Care Integration grants, which included OT in the list of professions to be considered for the interdisciplinary team.
  - This inclusion recognizes the important role OT can play in integrating physical and behavioral health.
Structuring Your Meeting

• Take the time to make sure they understand how OT services can help people with mental illness before asking for support of the bill.

• Describing how mental illness can affect daily routines, function, and ability to participate in life roles is often very effective.

• Use vignettes and personal experiences to make your point. Think broadly about occupational therapy in mental health – schools, veterans, community-based, geriatric, whatever you are the most comfortable with.

• We are including AOTA Fact Sheets on the role of OT in community mental health and with PTSD in your Congressional Packets. These are a great resource to help develop your talking points.