

## **MOTION 1**

Examination of AOTA Position on Entry-Level Education for the Occupational Therapist

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**MOTION:** We move that the Representative Assembly (RA) establish an ad hoc committee of the Commission on Education (COE) and Commission on Practice (COP) to review the assumptions and positions within Resolution J, 1999, dealing with entry-level practice (for the occupational therapist) to determine and clarify the profession's current position on master's and doctoral entry into the profession, considering the significant distinctions made by two standards of education based on degree level. The goal of the committee should be to recommend if the profession should continue to adhere to Resolution J, revise and alter Resolution J, or rescind Resolution J and construct a new guideline. Dependent upon the recommendation, additional suggestions for implementing the recommendations should be made as appropriate. This ad hoc committee should be given purview to explore all history related to Resolution J in light of the Centennial Vision and current practice trends, education standards and outcome expectations for degree levels, and market and health care policy forces. The outcome of the committee should be a report to the 2008 Representative Assembly (spring meeting) summarizing findings.

**RATIONALE:** Resolution J, 1999, called for the education of occupational therapists to move to a post-baccalaureate level. Under that resolution, entry-level programs could be master's or doctoral level. At the time Resolution J became effective, baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral level degree programs were accredited under the same set of standards for entry-level programs.

Since that time, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and the U.S. Department of Education have indicated that if two degree levels (master's and doctoral) are accredited, then distinct standards should clearly delineate the differences in education for each and be reflective of the differences between the level of a master's versus doctoral degree. As a result, the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) has developed standards for master's entry-level (adopted 2006) and doctoral entry-level occupational therapy education (adopted 2006).

While the profession's position on entry into the profession is clearly defined in current positions, among educational programs wide and varied opinions have been expressed concerning the meaning, impact, and potential results of the two standards for education at different degree levels. The recently adopted standards for master's and doctoral programs specify sets of knowledge that will result in unique differences between doctoral prepared entry-level practitioners beyond that of master's entry-level in recognition of the rigor and substantive difference in doctoral degree level. Carnegie classification, student focus, as well as many other factors could impact how this is viewed. Within various forums (Program Directors Education Council, listservs, etc.)

concerns such as the impact on enrollment, impact on perceived value or legitimacy of one degree over another, impact on program viability, or impact on practice roles have been discussed. As a result, this motion asserts that a review of the current position is both timely and needed.

Additionally, a report from the Ad Hoc Panel to Explore Outcomes of Occupational Therapy (OT)/Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA) Degrees is anticipated to be submitted at the 2007 RA meeting. This report will include outcomes directed at the three entry-levels (OTA, OT master's, OT doctoral), including distinctions between the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the various practitioners by degree level. Some potential consequences of this could be confusion over the value of one degree compared to another, belief that an OT with a specific degree is suited to a particular role, or the use of the information in health care policy setting as minimum standards for competence.

Marketplace demands, trends in education of other health care professionals, and health care policy are other critical elements to understand when considering the impact of entry-level into the profession. Clinical practitioners and departments may recognize trends within the health care climate and service delivery needs that could affect the professional roles of entry-level practitioners prepared with one degree or the other. Additionally, potential students may question the benefits of one degree over another or the potential roles and career progression each degree may lead to. Many stakeholders hold essential information that should be considered as a comprehensive analysis of the current situation is begun. As such, education should not be considered in isolation but rather with the acknowledgement that degree levels could impact employment trends and the viability of the profession as a whole in the competitive health care market. Most critically, these issues directly impact our profession's path and progression toward the Centennial Vision of a **“powerful, widely recognized, science-driven, and evidence-based profession with a globally connected and diverse workforce meeting society's occupational needs.”** What type of practitioner will help us meet this vision?

Because of these factors, an ad hoc committee consisting of representatives from the COE (3 members), the COP (3 members), and ACOTE (1 member) would provide representation of the multiple stakeholders interested in this discussion. The COE would function as a representative of educational programs, the COP would represent the clinical practice arena, and ACOTE would provide critical history into the current development of standards and the impact of various recommendations. In order to determine the profession's position, practitioners representing multiple roles should provide expert input as a comprehensive determination of the needs of the profession is developed.

In conclusion, considering the changes in the education guidelines since Resolution J, the potential unintended results of different and specific standards for master's and doctoral entry-level education on roles and responsibilities within practice and education, and multiple external factors and forces, we call for the profession's informed position to be clearly defined.

**FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:** Total of \$7,808  
Ad Hoc Committee (based on a 7-member group)

- Staff Time: Coordination of Committee Activities: \$500
- Travel to AOTA National Office (one 2-day meeting): \$5,880

|                                     |       |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| Air Fare:                           | \$325 |
| Per Diem: (3 days)                  | \$105 |
| Hotel (3 nights):                   | \$360 |
| Related Expenses (Food / Services): | \$50  |
| Total: (per person)                 | \$840 |
| (7 people x \$840 = \$5,880)        |       |

- Electronic or Telephone: Total \$378  
6 conference calls, 90 minutes each:  
\$0.10/ minute x 90 minutes = \$9 x 7 = \$63 per call  
\$63 x 6 calls = \$378  
(May not be necessary if systems at AOTA can accommodate this format.)
- Postage/Duplicating: \$50
- Posting of Recommendations if appropriate  
(AOTA's *1-Minute Update*, Other Media): \$1,000

#### **RELATIONSHIP TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN:**

This motion directly supports the AOTA Strategic Goals and Objectives 1 (building the profession's capacity to fulfill its potential and mission) and 2 (demonstrating and articulating our value to individuals, organizations, and communities). Specifically, Goal 1 calls for "preparing occupational therapists for the 21<sup>st</sup> century" and "ensuring a diverse workforce for multiple roles." Goal 2 further focuses on an increase of "public understanding of the profession and its value in meeting diverse health and participation needs" and support of "traditional occupational therapy roles" and fostering of "the development of emerging practice areas to help meet society's health, wellness, and quality of life needs."

#### Acknowledgements:

The following sources assisted by providing information regarding the process for submitting motions and background to the issue. Thank you.

#### Program Directors Education Council Meeting/ACOTE Representatives:

Discussion of New Standards for Master's and Doctoral Entry-level Standards.  
 Nichelle L. Miedema, MPA, OTR/L, Iowa Representative to the RA  
 Christine Urish, PhD, OTR/L, BCMH, President of the Iowa OT Association  
 AOTA staff