

# Occupational Therapy Advocacy, Policy, and Leadership

OTD Capstone Educational Session

By: Jaden Johnson

# Objectives

## Participants will:

- Identify the role of professional advocacy in supporting occupational therapy practice, policy, and client access to care.
- Recognize opportunities for engagement in state and national advocacy initiatives, including legislation and professional organization involvement.
- Access practical advocacy resources and strategies to support active participation in grassroots and professional advocacy efforts.

# Definitions

## Advocacy:

- “the act of speaking up or working on behalf of the interest of another person, group, or cause” (Jacobs & McCormack, 2019)

## Professional Advocacy:

- "a specific type of advocacy in which an individual engages to strengthen a profession, identify problems at an institutional level, contribute to legislative change and influence population-based decisions" (Grace, 2001)

# The Power of Advocacy in Occupational Therapy

- Advocacy is using knowledge and leadership for informed decision-making.
- Being an advocate is also ensuring OT services remain accessible and valued in healthcare reform.
- Every OT practitioner can be a potential advocate—locally, statewide, and nationally.



**What can you do to advocate for occupational therapy?**



# OT's Role in Policy and Legislation



Policies and laws influence how, where, and when OT services are delivered.



KY State Practice Acts define scope and licensure requirements.



US laws (like IDEA, Medicare) shape reimbursement and access.



AOTA and state associations like KOTA protect OT's role in healthcare systems.



Kentucky Board of Licensure for Occupational Therapy protects the consumer (i.e. patients served by occupational therapy)

# Why Advocacy Matters

- Advocacy allows us to seek occupational justice and health equity for our clients and selves
- Prioritizes clients access to meaningful occupations
- Empowers OTs and OTAs to become leaders of change
- As a professional, your reach must advance beyond clinical skills- know your laws and policies, know the 'why' behind clinical interventions, and be ready to explain them at varying educational levels



**Where do you recognize a need for advocacy as a student or practitioner?**



# Leadership in Occupational Therapy

- Key traits: honesty, collaboration, accountability, and vision.
- Occupational Therapy practitioners advocate for change at a systemic level.
- Dr. Dee Fink's Human Dimension -> learning about your role in how you can help others as an OT/OTA advocate enables you to be more effective in your work professionally and provide a new perspective of your self-image (Fink, 2003).



**How do you lead?**



# Role in Healthcare Reform

- OT/OTAs contribute to client-based care by promoting participation and outcomes.
- Healthcare reform requires demonstrating OT/OTAs necessity of interventions.
- Advocacy links policy goals to improved client-centered care.

Examples:

- Promoting policies that reimburse preventative OT interventions.
- Expansion of credibility in mental health services

 **In your practice setting, what area could occupational therapy be more effective?** 

## Common advocacy activities:

- Writing to legislators.
- Meeting with state representatives or attending KOTA Hill Day.
- Defining Occupational Therapy to inform the public and members of interdisciplinary teams about our purpose and role in healthcare
- Sharing how the profession can be more effective with adequate resources, support, and acknowledgement

## What is your elevator speech?

- What is OT?
- Why should it matter to politicians/the public?
- What are your goals for the profession?

Practice  
Advocacy

# AOTA Resources

## Free Non-Member Resources:

- [AOTA Main Advocacy Page](#)
- [Legislative Action Center](#)
- [Advocacy News updates](#)
- [Advocacy Issues](#)
- [Everyday Advocacy Decision Guide](#)
- [How to be an Everyday Advocate](#)
- [How to Shake Hands While Campaigning](#)

**\*\*\*Join AOTA for more in-depth resources, articles, and continuing education credits!\*\*\***

# KY Resources

## Licensure and Regulatory Information

- [Kentucky Board of Licensure for Occupational Therapy](#)
- [Kentucky Occupational Therapy Laws & Regulations](#)
- [Kentucky Occupational Therapy Provider Information and Resources](#)

## Legislation and Advocacy

- [Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental, and Intellectual Disabilities \(DBHDID\)](#)
- [Kentucky Overdose Response Effort \(KORE\)](#)
- [Kentucky General Assembly](#)
- [Kentucky Bill Watch](#)
- [Kentucky Legislative Live Streams](#)

# KY Resources

## Members of KOTA have access to:

- Opportunities to network with other occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants and students to share common interests and concerns
- Benefit from the services of a political lobbyist who tracks issues impacting occupational therapy in Kentucky
- Opportunities for leadership to shape the future of occupational therapy
- Reduced fees for continuing education, workshops, and the annual conference
- Access to the KOTA Membership Directory
- Access to job postings
- Eligibility for awards and recognitions
- Eligibility for continuing education scholarships
- Opportunities to participate in District activities

# Connecting Advocacy to OT Core Values

**Altruism:**  
acting in the  
best interest  
of clients and  
communities.

**Equality and  
Justice:**  
promoting fair  
access to  
services.

**Dignity:**  
respecting all  
individuals'  
right to  
participate.

**Truth and  
Prudence:**  
using evidence  
to inform  
advocacy  
efforts.

**WHAT WILL YOU DO TO  
ADVOCATE FOR THE  
PROFESSION OF  
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY?**

**HOW WILL YOU ENSURE  
THAT OCCUPATIONAL  
THERAPY IS A VALUED  
PROFESSION?**

# Jeopardy!

Test your knowledge on OT advocacy, leadership, and policy!

To Play: launch website link located below in notes, select number of teams, follow site directions for revealing questions/answers

Categories:

1. OT & Policy Basics

2. Practice Advocacy

3. Legislation & Healthcare Reform

4. Leadership & Professional Identity

5. OT's Impact

# References

American Occupational Therapy Association. (2020). *AOTA 2020 occupational therapy code of ethics*. American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 74(Supplement 3).

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American Occupational Therapy Association. (2025). *Everyday advocacy for OT practitioners*. AOTA. <https://www.aota.org/advocacy/everyday-advocacy>

Fink, L. D. (2003). *What is “significant learning”?* University of Oklahoma, Instructional Development Program.

Grace, P. J. (2001). Professional advocacy: Widening the scope of accountability. *Nursing Philosophy*, 2(2), 151-162.

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Jacobs, K., & McCormack, G. L. (2019). *The Occupational Therapy Manager*. AOTA Press.