

SHINING IN COVID DARKNESS

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What a wonderful conference we had this year! Despite the challenges of the COVID pandemic, the conference committee creatively designed a

weekend of virtual sessions, award ceremony, and even an exhibit hall like none other. Thank you to the moderators who made sure mic for speakers were on (my students would appreciate not having to tell me to unmute) and that screens were shared with minimal to no glitches. Kudos to all who faced the challenges of learning new software in a short time to ensure the conference would provide quality continuing education as it always has. But we know facing challenges is something we practitioners are accustomed to, and our skills tend to shine in the process.

Many look forward to ending 2020 and pushing the reset button in 2021, but let us take a moment to remember that our profession has illuminated during dark times such as these. WWI was an extremely dark time for our nation, but it moved AOTA founding member, Eleanor Clarke Slagle, to advocate for occupational therapy services for wounded soldiers. A result of her mission to improve quality of life, occupational therapy schools were created. OT services were important for servicemen suffering from war neurosis as well as those with injuries.

Beginning in the 1980s, the AIDs epidemic blind-sided the world. Those suffering from the disease were dealing not only with its effects, but also the stigmatism of the disease.

Dr. Gary Kielhofner, most notably known for developing the Model of Human Occupation, worked with this population to improve ability to perform meaningful occupations. He provided evidenced-based articles on improving quality of life of those dealing with this deadly disease while awaiting a vaccine. His work shone as a bright light for those who felt hopeless by showing them how they could engage in purposeful activities despite illness.

And now we are faced with COVID19. Although it may be too early to know if a trailblazing OT practitioner will emerge to introduce new approaches to this pandemic, we have already witnessed a trend to new settings within our profession. For years, telehealth was a vision for a way to provide services to those unable to be seen in clinics because of illness, lack of transportation, or living in rural communities where services are not available. Telehealth now allows practitioners to provide quality health care in ways envisioned long ago. Educators immediately transitioned from in-class lectures to virtual teaching through Zoom to complete the semester and to move forward to ensure students were able to complete OT/OTA programs on time. COVID caused educators to quickly develop creative online teaching techniques to keep future practitioners engaged in the process. Initially, students thought their skills would be impaired due to less in class time, but they learned how creative being in OT can truly be. They learned how practitioners are able to provide quality care without being physically present in the room. If it were not for COVID, how long would it have taken us to advance to this point?

The year 2020 serves a purpose for us after all. These recent challenges due

to COVID forced us out of our comfort zones; however, because of our passion and commitment to the profession we are meeting these challenges by modifying methods of practice and teaching. So, kudos to us all, shining lights in the COVID darkness!

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