



Report of the Professional Issues Forum on Growing Through Occupation and Active Living Saint John, NB CAOT Conference 2002

Introduction

The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) Professional Issue Forum on Growing through Occupation and Active Living was developed in partnership with the Active Living Coalition for Older Adults (ALCOA) <http://www.alcoa.ca> This forum was an initiative in support of “Moving through the Years: A Blueprint for Action for Active Living and Older Adults,” a document which outlines a national framework for supporting an active way of life. In particular, the Forum addressed the Blueprint’s priority goals of increasing public awareness about the benefits of active living throughout the life span, and sharing of information among organizations with an interest in active living and older adults.

The Forum on was held at the Saint John Trade and Convention Centre, May 26, 2002 from 1:30 to 3:30 pm. There were approximately 35 participants in attendance. This number included the speakers and invited representatives of CAOT constituent and stakeholder groups, and other delegates to the CAOT conference.

Format

The Forum consisted of panel presentations, roundtable discussion and large group discussion.

Facilitator:

Dr. Tina Pranger, Coordinator, Results Measurement Unit, PEI Department of Health & Social Services

Panelists:

Flora M. Dell, Cert. Gero., National Spokesperson, Active Living Coalition for Older Adults (ALCOA)
Jack Brownell, Immediate Past-President, Canadian Senior Games Association, Current President, New Brunswick Senior Games Association, Guardian, Active Living Coalition for Older Adults (ALCOA)

Sandra Hobson, Associate Professor, School of Occupational Therapy at The University of Western Ontario

Objectives of the Forum were:

1. Develop common understanding of Active Living and the implications for health and well-being of older adults.
2. Profile the role of occupational therapy in aging and active living, with emphasis on the central role of occupation in promoting and maintaining health throughout the life-span.
3. Create networks with key stakeholders involved in active living and older adults, to develop action plans to address barriers to active living (including physical, cognitive and emotional function; accessibility, safety and security, and support: ALCOA Blueprint for Action, 1999, p. 10-11).

4. Develop a CAOT discussion paper on active living as an essential component of health and quality of life, based on collaboration among organizations present at the Forum (ALCOA Blueprint for Action, p. 12-13, Goal # 1, 4).

Presentations

Dr. Tina Pranger introduced the session and reviewed background issues related to seniors, active living and occupational therapy. She began by defining active living as a way of life which values and includes physical activity and emphasized the health risk for older adults from sedentary living and the benefits of regular physical exercise. She presented various working definitions of occupation, occupational performance and occupational therapy and identified some relevant key professional issues such as changing population demographics, health care shift to health promotion and home and community based services and the increasing professional focus on evidence based practice, client-centredness and client participation.

Panelists:

1. **Flora Dell** described one organization concerned with seniors and active living, namely, ALCOA and its vision of a society where seniors are active. She identified a number of concerns and challenges to realizing this vision:
 - 1/3 of older adults risk functional decline
 - strategies for empowering older adults to become more active
 - barriers to participation such as accessibility, transportation, safety, cost, fear of failure, lack of choice and poor program design.
2. **Jack Brownell** described and showed a video clip of the Seniors Games as one example of how seniors are and can be active. He also spoke of the value of fitness and the impact of winter and the fear of falling on seniors' activity level. As well, he emphasized the need to lobby government and physicians to support active living.
3. **Professor Sandra Hobson** presented an occupational therapy perspective on active living. She noted how our professional beliefs and research both demonstrate that engagement in occupation positively effects quality of health. She pointed out that occupational therapy and actively living share values and beliefs and that occupational therapy has a role to play in promoting active living be it through encouraging engagement in meaningful occupations, adapting activities or modifying the environment.

Roundtable Discussion

Participants addressed the following questions in the roundtables:

1. Identify 3 strengths that occupational therapists bring to active living for healthy older adults and those with physical and/or mental health problems. What resources and support do occupational therapists need to increase their role in active living?
2. Consider the barriers to active living identified in the Blueprint (p. 10) and in the presentations today. List 3 strategies to address these barriers.

Summary of Discussion

1. Strengths that occupational therapist bring to active living with seniors.

Beliefs in:

- The importance of meaning and choice in activities.
- Empowerment of clients
- Client-centredness

Knowledge

- Holistic knowledge of aging
- Awareness of the physiology of aging and relevant medical conditions
- Able to see broad benefits of active living
- Application of the Person/Environment/Occupation model to seniors and active living

Skills

- Ability to analyze activities with consideration to the individual engaging in them.
- Using task analysis to modify activities to enable easier participation
- Ability to problem solve creatively to overcome barriers to active living

2. The resources and supports occupational therapists need to increase their role in active living.

Knowledge base needed:

- Of community resources
- Of barriers in the community

Skills needed:

- Lobbying skills to influence change
- Ability to network with and utilize existing groups involved in active living

3. Strategies to address the barriers to active living identified in the “Blueprint”.

Barrier	Strategies
Motivation	- partner with peers - use seniors as instructors
Accessibility	- advocate for accessible resources - be proactive when resources are being designed
Transportation, weather & safety	- buddy systems - advocate for safe locations and adequate transportation - participate with the senior in activities - choose and develop accessible locations

Short staffing, high caseloads,
Lack of management support

- educate staff and volunteers re: value of
active living for seniors

Discomfort relating to professionals

- empower seniors to become volunteers
- promote seniors to become peer staff
persons

4. How occupational therapists can promote active living

Educate seniors

- eg. on the relationship between occupation and health
- through “healthy living” Tupperware type parties

Educate staff

- need for flexibility to accommodate seniors’ needs

Involvement

- integrate the voice of the consumer in planning

Partnerships

- facilitate support networks among seniors
- between different groups eg. children, seniors & animals

Advocacy & awareness

- societal recognition of seniors & their needs
- increase awareness of negative stereotypes of seniors and encourage positive depictions of healthy, active seniors

In daily practice

- model active living & join seniors in participation
- set small specific goals
- increase awareness of community resources & make appropriate referrals
- facilitate activity – look for opportunities & promote involvement
- prescribe active living activities
- present range of active living options for seniors to engage in

Report submitted by: Dr. Tina Pranger, Facilitator