



# Report of the Professional Issues Forum on **Research Without Borders: Overcoming Barriers to Collaborative Research** Montreal, QC CAOT Conference 2006

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## **Introduction**

The CAOT Professional Issue Forum on Research without Borders: Overcoming barriers to collaborative research was held at the Fairmont Queen Elizabeth Hotel, Montreal, QC on June 3, 2006 from 8:30-11:30 am. The purpose of the forum was to gain perspectives on the special features of collaborative research and provide direction for CAOT's future initiatives in this area.

## **Format**

A panel of five presenters was followed by a plenary discussion. Facilitated group discussions were planned but this was pre-empted as the number of attendees allowed for a plenary session. Approximately 20 delegates participated. The Professional Issue Forum was facilitated by Donna Klaiman, CAOT Director of Standards and Professional Affairs

## **Presenters**

Jenny Butler, President, British Association of Occupational Therapist

Anne Carswell, Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists Delegate to the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT)

Mary Law, McMaster University

Susan Law, Director, Research Programs, Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (CHSRF)

Helene Polatajko, University of Toronto (representing Caroline Baum, President, American Occupational Therapy Association)

## **Table Facilitators**

Sandra Bressler, President, Canadian Occupational Therapy Foundation

Sue Forwell, President-Elect, Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists

Sangita Kamblé, Executive Directive, Canadian Occupational Therapy Foundation

## **Objectives of the Forum**

1. Learn about the trends and unique features of collaborative research.
2. Recommend directions to CAOT regarding collaborative research.

**The Forum addressed the following four very important questions:**

1. Why is collaborative research important for the development of new knowledge for the profession?
2. Where are the emerging opportunities for collaborative research?
3. What are the barriers and facilitators to participation in collaborative research?
4. How can we best position the profession to make use of emerging opportunities?

## **1. Why is collaborative research important for the development of new knowledge for the profession?**

Collaborative research is defined as a deliberate set of interactions and processes designed specifically to bring researchers, decision-makers, practitioners and citizens to broaden ways to define problems and research methodologies so that the research results are relevant in practice and can also inform policy decisions. Collaborative research is a way to bring about changes in the way researchers think and practitioner takes action (Denis and Lomas, 2003).

Collaborative research is relevant to the development of new knowledge for occupational therapy for a number of reasons. Occupational therapists in Canada have developed a global reputation for excellence in the development of new knowledge and research capacity in occupational therapy. Looking ahead, we recognize that the demands as well as opportunities for research will increase in future. Salient factors include growing global competition for occupational therapy services and professionals, comparative international assessments of outcomes and the rapid diffusion of new approaches, best practices and knowledge. In addition, occupational therapists will continue to experience competition at home from other professional groups with well established research infrastructures. CAOT needs to be positioned so that our research informs public policy decisions.

Collaborative research has many advantages over single discipline research. There is a higher quality of research when many disciplines and/or organizations combine their expertise and resources. It also lowers the duplication of similar work across disciplines and organizations.

Increasingly CAOT members have established partnerships to broaden their scope of opportunities for research. Their activities have been facilitated by new information and communication technologies that allow for increasingly rapid and cheaper transfers of information, data analysis and publication of research findings. Many of these partnerships transcend borders: geographic, political and disciplinary.

Examples of collaborative research exist within Canada and across countries. Within Canada, McMaster University and the University of British Columbia have a training grant for rehabilitation research; the Family Alliance of Ontario, along with McMaster University and Ryerson University are developing community faculty as part of a consumer network. Internationally, Canada, Israel, Australia and New Zealand are conducting a cross validation of assessment of children's participation; Canada and the US are working on research related to brain recovery and performance; and Canada, Australia and the US are investigating methods to support evidence-based practice.

Internationally, collaborative research develops graduates and scholars who are internationally knowledgeable, culturally flexible and who take into account in their work, the increasing

interdependent nature of occupational therapy practice and research. International collaborative research is essential for access to the global knowledge and expertise. It brings different research perspectives to bear on key national and global occupational therapy issues. Collaborative research will maximize access to research funds.

## **2. Where are the emerging opportunities for collaborative research?**

The Forum presenters identified the following emerging opportunities for collaborative research:

### **Internationally**

As world governments, granting agencies and universities work to internationalize their research efforts, an opportunity is created to develop collaboration synergies among the profession and these organizations.

The World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) is committed to advancing collaborative international research among its member countries. Its research vision is to address the diverse needs and approaches of the entire range of occupational therapy and occupational science research. Recognizing the particular challenges of collaboration with researchers in developing countries, WFOT would like to realize increased participation. WFOT encourages building on existing research so that collaborative activities do not duplicate or overlap with activities already undertaken by member countries or other organizations.

### **United Kingdom (UK)**

There is limited access to funding to address practice questions; rather UK funders are looking for collaborative program-based research.

### **United States of America**

There is greater access to funding for collaborative research provided that the research can be translated into practice.

### **Canada**

Funding agencies are promoting more interdisciplinary collaboration as evidenced by support for pre-research activities such as exploratory and planning meetings and other funding call opportunities.

### **Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (CHSRF)**

- Development grants

### **Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR)**

- Operating grants
- Team grants: The objective is to strengthen Canadian health research by supporting teams of talented and experienced researchers conducting high-quality research and providing superior research training and mentorship.
- Training grants: The objective is to build capacity within Canada's health research community through training and development of researchers.

- International Opportunities Fund: Collaborative research program

### **Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI)**

- International Joint Venture Project

### **Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC)**

- International collaboration
- International exploratory visits
- International projects

### **Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council**

- Community University Research Alliances
- International Opportunities Fund: Developmental and project grants

### **Heart and Stroke Foundation**

- Team grants

### **Hospital for Sick Children Foundation**

- Strategic grants

## 3. What are the barriers and facilitators to participation in collaborative research?

### **A. Barriers**

Barriers identified included:

- Collaboration requires greater time commitments.
- Developing countries do not have research capacity or financial support.
- Communication issues can arise because of distance.
- Sharing resources and revenue can be challenging.
- Need for all partners to fulfil their commitments and maintain involvement.
- Issues specific to collaboration with people of different disciplines and cultures, including:
  - Language and communication
  - Culturally sensitive instruments
  - Availability of technology or resources to support international research projects
  - Different systems of service delivery

### **B. Facilitators**

- As many funding agencies such as CIHR and CHRSF in Canada are promoting collaboration, there are more opportunities to access funds.
- There are existing national and international collaborative research activities and models of collaboration.

- There is interest in collaborative activities by professional issue forum representatives from Canada, UK and USA.
- CAOT has already developed web site pages on research and there is potential to expand this area.
- WFOT is interested in the following initiatives:
  - Development of an Internet-based course to facilitate collaborative international research skills and abilities
  - Development of an International Advisory Group on collaborative international research
  - Establishment of a sub-group of the Education and Research program to oversee the development of a WFOT web page linking researchers, identifying and promoting funding opportunities
- The Canadian Occupational Therapy Foundation has an interest in supporting collaborative research.

4. How can we best position the profession to make use of emerging opportunities?

**Recommendations:**

The professional issue forum identified opportunities to produce research that will enable occupational therapists to address best practices that go beyond regional approaches and new challenges in the international and domestic workplace. While we recognize that there are pockets of collaborative research within occupational therapy, we need to augment capacity, develop coordinated research resources and an agenda to advance knowledge creation in this area.

CAOT has an opportunity to take a leadership role in facilitating the development of collaborative research domestically and internationally. Collaborative research can contribute to the development of the profession in Canada and abroad.

It is recommended that CAOT facilitate the development of a collaborative research agenda. The following actions and mechanisms will strengthen and position the profession to make use of emerging opportunities in collaborative research:

- Identify and work with leaders and champions of collaborative research to develop research direction.
- Seek out development grants or seed grants to develop proposals.
- Leverage areas for collaborative research that will inform public policy such as:
  - Outcome assessments and cost-effectiveness studies
  - Knowledge transfer methods
  - Occupational performance
  - Intervention research
  - Build support to create partnerships by bringing together researchers, practitioners, policy makers and clients to share, learn and listen.
  - Facilitate the development of a collaborative research agenda.
  - Enhance communication mechanisms using web-based tools and voice over IP for teleconferencing.

For more information contact the CAOT Director of Standards at [standards@caot.ca](mailto:standards@caot.ca)

