

History of Mississippi Occupational Therapy Association

MSOTA was established in April of 1976. Prior to 1976, Mississippi and Alabama occupational therapists were a joint state association known as the Alabama-Mississippi Occupational Therapy Association (AMOTA). At that time Alabama members were 49 OTR's, 1 COTA, and 8 OTS's. Mississippi members were 20 OTR's, 2 COTA's, and no students. In 1975 a task force chaired by Maurine Williams of Mississippi was formed to investigate separation of the two states and reorganization of two individual state organizations. Reasons for the separation were to reduce travel time to meetings; state-wide meetings could be more appropriate to needs of therapists; licensure and PSRO could be more effectively handled on a statewide basis; and more therapists would be active if only one state comprised the organization.

Funds were set aside for a Mississippi organization using a per capita formula. By April 1976, the separation of Mississippi and Alabama was complete, and a slate of officers was elected to MSOTA. The first newsletter was published to a membership of approximately 22 members.

By August 1976, MSOTA Executive Board approved a licensure budget and appointed Karen Meisel licensure chairperson. In January 1977, MSOTA sponsored an Occupational Therapy Practice Act in the Mississippi House of Representatives and the Senate. By February the bill died in the first committee cut-off. Also in 1977, Dr. Thomas Freeland of University of Mississippi Medical Center sought the assistance and support of MSOTA in pursuit of an OT school.

In January, 1978, still trying to get its feet firmly on the ground, the association again sponsored Practice Act Bills in the House and Senate. By February 1978, the bill died in committee. The bills died in committee due to lack of overall state support and lack of awareness of occupational therapy in the state. Promotion of OT and licensure were priority items for 1978-79. Continuing education programs were sponsored by MSOTA to bring more OT's together.

In September 1978, through the efforts of Dean Thomas Freeland of UMC and Dean Stanley Abadie of LSUMC, the first Mississippi students were enrolled in the LSU/UMC Occupational Therapy cooperative agreement program.

1979 was dedicated to licensure efforts, including speakers at state meeting, legislative contacts, a letter writing campaign, development of an information packet for members, and pre-filing the OT Licensure Bill for the 1980 legislative session.

In January 1980, MSOTA sponsored its third licensure bill in the House and in February 1980 the bill died in committee due to opposition from the president of the Mississippi Hospital Association. Karen Meisel, MSOTA president and legislative chair brought together members to develop new goals and strategies for MSOTA. The goals were: 1) public awareness campaign; 2) continued education programs and mini workshops for fund raising and educational purposes; 3) OT licensure, pursue fundraising, hire lobbyist, organize campaign for 1982 legislative session.

After three unsuccessful attempts at licensure, members were surveyed regarding their needs and desire to seek licensure. As a result of the survey, a long range plan was established which included the 1984 Licensure Bill.

Fundraising for licensure efforts began in 1981. AOTA got a new building and MSOTA got a new newsletter cover and format. In 1982 MSOTA received the VOICE OF MEMBERSHIP AWARD from AOTA. Continuing education opportunities through efforts of MSOTA increased. Mary Peters of AOTA's Government and Legal Affairs Division was guest speaker at the State Meeting in September 1982. President Ann Pickett attended the GLAD workshop in Dallas regarding licensure techniques. Support for licensing was pledged by Mississippi Alliance of Health Related Professionals, Mississippi Coalition of Handicapped Individuals, and Living Independence for Everyone.

In June 1983 a meeting was held with Attorney Clifford Thompson, lobbyist. A feasibility study was done by Mr. Thompson. A survey was sent to members regarding the controversy, complexity and extensive financial implications of Mr. Thompson's study results. Results of this survey were favorable except for financial support and the MSOTA Board decided not to pursue licensure in the 1984 session.

In 1983 MSOTA is a co-sponsor of the First Great Southern OT Conference in Atlanta. An OT Awards committee is established. The Medicare prospective payment system is introduced to occupational therapists in Mississippi.

No licensure bill was filed in 1984 due to unfavorable support of financial implications. New strategic planning issues and objectives are identified. MSOTA supports AOTA efforts to extend Medicare coverage of OT in rehab, nursing homes and private practice.

In 1985, MSOTA members helped form the first AD HOC STUDY COMMITTEE in pursuit of establishing an OT school in Mississippi.

In 1986 the first OT Outstanding Award was given to Bernice Lowry for her contributions to the promotion of OT since the beginning of OT in Mississippi.

Fundraising for licensure efforts continued. Barbara Hanft from the AOTA GLAD office spoke at the July 1987 state meeting and an SIS sharing session is also held. Work continues on the OT school at the persistence of MSOTA president Fran Carter and Chairperson Mary Adams.

Work is completed for pre-filing a licensure bill for the 1988 legislative session. Legislative Chairperson, Susan Jeminez is the key to legislative and member support gained for the 1988 Licensure Bill. On April 26, 1988 the Mississippi Occupational Therapy Practice Act is signed into law.

In March of 1989, Joan Smith, OTR, is honored with MSOTA's Distinguished Therapist's Award. In May of 1989, the association is saddened at the loss of this dear friend and devoted therapist. A dedication and memorial is given in Joan Smith's honor.

1989 brings good news of the approval and funding for the UMMC School of Occupational Therapy.