

Interview for Brazil June 2009

1. What is WFOT?

The World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) is the key international representative for occupational therapists and occupational therapy around the world, and the official international organisation for the promotion of occupational therapy.

Founded in 1952, the World Federation of Occupational Therapists directly links 66 member countries and organisations across the world. The mission of WFOT is to promote occupational therapy as an art and science internationally. The Federation supports the development, use and practice of occupational therapy worldwide, demonstrating its relevance and contribution to society

WFOT promotes occupational therapy is an autonomous health care profession. It states that occupational therapy (OT) services are determined (designed) only by qualified occupational therapists many of whom are graduates of a World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) directly approved educational programme which meets the WFOT's Minimum Standards for the Education of Occupational Therapists (2002).

The WFOT is an active and vibrant organisation which supports the emergence and development of occupational therapy internationally and its objectives are:

- to act as the official international organization for the promotion of occupational therapy;
- to develop and maintain the Minimum Standards for the Education of Occupational Therapists
- to promote international cooperation among occupational therapy associations, therapists and other allied professional groups;
- to advance the practice and standards of occupational therapy;
- to help maintain the ethics and to advance the interests of the profession;
- to facilitate the international exchange and placements of therapists and students;
- to facilitate the exchanges of information;
- to promote the education of therapists; and
- to hold international congresses.

2. How does WFOT serve OT around the world?

Many of these member countries have a long and enviable history in sponsoring the successful development of the profession and occupational therapy services internationally. The WFOT looks to its member countries to continue its professional leadership role by assisting in increasing the power of occupation internationally.

WFOT plays a key role in setting standards and guiding the development of occupational therapy education programmes in member countries, thus enabling the number of people receiving occupational therapy qualifications to be increased to meet the health needs of the population. Systems for the ongoing monitoring and approval of these education programmes are also managed by WFOT in conjunction with the member countries.

Connecting members from around the world informs occupational therapy practice. The 'Bulletin' is the professional journal of the WFOT. The Bulletin is published twice a year, and contains peer-reviewed articles about occupational therapy practice and issues in occupational therapy from a variety of member countries.

The WFOT website is a primary vehicle for connecting and informing members. At www.wfot.org, the general public and WFOT members can access information about the work of WFOT. Examples include the general public being able to obtain information about occupational therapy, the WFOT; and occupational therapy education programmes. Members can access a wide range of resources to inform their practice; apply for professional and research awards; participate in chat room discussions on professional issues; keep up to date with WFOT projects, and contribute to the projects as appropriate.

Member countries nominate a delegate to WFOT, and these delegates attend meetings to work on issues pertinent to WFOT and occupational therapy. Delegates report on professional issues in their home country, and undertake project work to further the aims of WFOT. On return to their home countries, delegates report on the work of WFOT and the international issues that are impacting occupational therapy. Many occupational therapists, along with their member country delegate, contribute significant expertise and time to WFOT projects and business.

3. How is WFOT working with WHO and how important is it

In 1959 WFOT was admitted into official relations with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and in 1963 it was recognised as a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) by the United Nations (UN).

The World Federation of Occupational Therapists has strong and influential relationships with a large number of international organizations. We work closely with the World Health Organization at both the central and regional level and are actively involved in a number of joint initiatives in an effort to strengthen the capacity of occupational therapy in promoting the health, welfare, education, vocational and daily living ability of individuals, families and communities.

WFOT maintains liaison with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other international (non-governmental) health organizations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO); International Institute on Ageing (INIA); Rehabilitation International (RI); International Council on Disability (ICOD); and, the World Confederation of Physical Therapists (WCPT) with whom WFOT has full professional relationship.

Some examples of how WFOT works with WHO include:

- Participation in a WHO/WFOT/WCPT taskforce on Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) which has produced an easy to read pictorial manual on the Care of Cerebral Palsy Children in rural and deprived environments of the world; and manuals on Spinal Cord Injury Patients and Care of those with Spina Bifida.
- Collaboration of WFOT with WHO and COTEC (Committee of Occupational Therapists in European Communities) in a quality assurance research project looking at the Aftercare of Stroke Victims.
- Participation with INIA in the development of a multidisciplinary educational course on Care of the Older Person designed for areas of the world where this problem is emerging.
- Contributing to the WHO Rehabilitation Matrix; curriculum on rehabilitation and human rights; wheelchair guidelines; and, the education module on disaster preparedness and response.

WFOT makes a very important contribution to the work of the WHO, by fostering multisectorial partnerships; building capacity among health rehabilitation policy makers and service providers; supporting the production, dissemination and use of key WHO documents and policies; raising the awareness of the magnitude and consequences of disability; promoting community based rehabilitation; and, mainstreaming disability within WHO in accordance with the Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities.

4. Tell me a little bit about OTION and how it can be an opportunity for Brazilian OT's

The Occupational Therapy International Outreach Network (OTION) is a grass roots initiative to promote outreach to areas of need by forming partnerships using the internet. By sharing information and resources, OTION seeks to minimise imbalances in access to occupational therapy services not only between 'developed' and 'developing' countries, but also within individual countries. OTION aims to raise awareness among occupational therapists of this inequality, and to provide practical ways in which everyone can help. OTION

aims to promote outreach to currently under-serviced populations by raising awareness of the needs of these groups among the profession; encouraging occupational therapists to work towards meeting these needs; and providing access to the necessary support, information and resources for occupational therapists to carry out this work in the best possible way.

The OTION page on the WFOT website www.wfot.org offers a borderless meeting place. It is designed to provide a central point for information and resources related to the practice of occupational therapy in developing countries and other client groups. It has been set up with the needs of therapists in isolated areas in mind, so they can use the OTION website as a 'stepping stone' to other internet based resources. The webpage also aims to facilitate networking among OTION members. For example, the member database allows users to search for other occupational therapists who are working, or have worked, in a particular country, clinical area, or with a particular organisation. It is then possible to make contact with that person directly via email; enable discussion between OTION members through the Forums and/or email list; provide information about opportunities to work or volunteer in developing countries and other areas of need. The website provides links to existing government and non-government programmes, as well as notify members of opportunities sourced within the profession itself.

OTION is available to Brazilian occupational therapists, along with others from around the world, to promote occupational therapy, make links with others, and share information and support to colleagues working in challenging situations.

5. What is the role of the WFOT Delegate?

The WFOT Delegate (and Alternate) is elected by the membership of the member country, usually for a four-year term.

Overall, the role of the Delegate includes:

- To increase the understanding of the purpose and functions of WFOT within their own country and to encourage individual membership of WFOT.
- To inform the National Association of the work of WFOT.
- To inform WFOT of issues in the member country.
- To contribute to working groups within the WFOT.
- A very important function is to encourage members of the national associations to participate in the myriad of WFOT projects.

At a more formal level, the WFOT Executive Board and the official Delegates of the national member organizations meet in a member country for a Council Meeting, every two years. This Meeting is of approximately one week duration, and the business undertaken during this time focuses on governing the affairs of the Federation. The Delegates report to WFOT on matters pertaining to their

member organizations. They participate in discussions and activities, and vote on behalf of their Member Organisation at elections on motions and on proposed Constitution and Standing Order changes or revisions. During the following year, Delegates fulfil responsibilities as established at the Council Meeting. They report fully on WFOT matters to their Member Organisation and present the agenda of future meetings of the Council of WFOT to the Council or Board of their Member Organisation in order that they may be instructed in regard to future action.

6. Why is it useful for an OT to be an individual member?

There are many benefits of becoming an individual member of WFOT!

A member of WFOT receives the Bulletin (professional journal) twice yearly, through which they can really see what is happening in the “International World of OT”. The scope of professional practices, from country to country, is extensive and WFOT actively supports relationships between countries, individual practitioners, educators and students, and these relationships continually expand dramatically. Members also receive an electronic newsletter twice yearly once they have activated their membership online.

The WFOT website www.wfot.org has a ‘Members only’ site which houses specific information available to members only. This information includes reports on WFOT projects; position papers relating to OT practice; applications for research awards; online versions of the Bulletin; and information about occupational therapy education programmes.

Members receive discounts on WFOT goods and services – they can purchase occupational therapy resources from the online shop at preferential rates, and can also register for the WFOT International Congress (held every four years) at a preferential rate.

Members are eligible to register with OTION (Occupational Therapists International Network) through the website, to seek or provide support from or to colleagues. This site also allows members to access information about non-government organisations which employ therapists in developing countries.

WFOT has strong and influential relationships with a large number of international organisations. It works closely with WHO (World Health Organisation) at both a central and regional level. Regional networks are also available to members, with each region conducting conferences and working groups that challenge issues on a more local level.

WFOT has an individual membership of in excess of 20,000 therapists and a country membership that represents 350,000 Occupational Therapists

internationally. Many of these people work actively in project teams that pursue over 50 separate initiatives. The Executive and the Coordinators of the other four programme areas - Education and Research; International Cooperation; Promotion and Development; and Standards and Quality - are actively recruiting interested therapists to work in whatever way they want to within these projects. You can Visit the WFOT website www.wfot.org and communicate directly with these Coordinators to discover more about the exciting activities.

Qualified occupational therapists and students who are interested in becoming individual members of WFOT are able to do so through their national association. It is only through your membership in your national association that your qualifications can be checked, and the status of individual membership of WFOT be given due recognition.

HOW DO I BECOME A MEMBER OF WFOT?

By paying an annual subscription to your national association which then forwards your membership fee directly to WFOT. If you have been educated in a country which is not the one in which you are currently working, it should be possible for you to become a member through your original (country of origin) association or through membership of the association in your new country.

If you have not graduated from a WFOT recognised education programme, please encourage your educational institution to undertake the process of recognition that your national association has established.

Your opinions and ideas will be welcome as will your energy when you become a member of a WFOT.