

Connecticut Occupational Therapy Association Quarterly Newsletter

April 2024



Welcome to the ConnOTA Newsletter!

Happy Occupational Therapy Month! To honor and celebrate the incredible work of Connecticut Occupational Therapists, we are launching a newsletter! Four years ago, the world changed dramatically. We have seen changes and growth here at ConnOTA as well. Transitioning our Annual Spring Conference to a virtual platform is one way we've embraced evolution. However, one thing has always stayed the same, our desire to serve those who practice the values and vision of our profession every day. We have been wanting to connect with our members in a way that feels personal and fun. We hope you welcome us to your inbox!

Firstly, we would like to express our gratitude to all who attended and presented at our 2024 Annual Spring Conference: Advocacy and Innovation. The day was filled with learning and exploring all the ways occupational therapy is pushing boundaries and showing our unique value across so many domains and settings - we dove into what it means to be an OT in these modern times.

We are also excited to share that our board is growing and evolving! As her term as comes to a close, we say goodbye and thank you to Corrin Campbell - the very first OTA holding the position of President in ConnOTA history. We are thrilled to welcome Amy Burton as our President Elect, serving many years on the ConnOTA Board of Directors, and known and loved as our current Vice President, we can't wait to see what Amy has in store for us in July 2024! We also have Anne Koba joining our Membership team, Madison Quick as our new Administrator and Lola Halperin as our new Academic Mental Health SIS Liaison. We are also looking to fill open positions, we are seeking a Treasurer, Vice President and Co-Chair for Member for Government Affairs. Keep reading to find out more!

We hope you enjoy this initial iteration of our quarterly newsletter. Together, we make a real difference in the lives of those who need it most.

The ConnOTA Board

Practitioner Spotlight: Kari

Tell us your OT story, what drove you to pursue the profession?

When I was in high school, my mother worked in an alternative school for students with intense behavioral needs. She introduced me to the occupational therapists who worked there and I was lucky enough to shadow and observe. It was a unique profession and intriguing to me. The rest is history!

Tell us something about your professional development journey. What is the coolest training you have participated in?

The Brain Injury Specialist training through the Brain Injury Association of America was by far the most interesting and valuable training I have had in my career. It led to me earning the Certified Brain Injury Specialist credential. This training was intensive, but took my brain injury rehabilitation knowledge and bolstered it even further so that I have confidence and skills to work with even the most complex survivors.



What are your personal interests and hobbies?

My two daughters, ages 7 and 9, keep me very busy! I am always doing something with them, whether it be shuffling them from activity to activity, or spending precious time doing crafts at home. They bring such joy to my life. As a family, we enjoy hiking with our golden retriever, Finnegan. Aside from that, last year I took up the hobby of hand lettering and calligraphy as a way to spend less time on my phone and more time putting pen to paper. It's been a real stress reliever!

During your career, what is something that really surprised you?

I have to say that I never planned to work in the field of neurorehabilitation. In fact, during graduate school I found the topic of neuroscience to be overwhelming and daunting! Next thing I knew, I was working nearly 10 years in the inpatient neurorehabilitation realm. Even more surprising was how much I genuinely loved the challenge of that practice area!

What about occupational therapy excites you the most?

In routine conversations, outside of work, I am hearing people mention occupational therapy and the phenomenal benefits. As a therapist, I have known that all along, but hearing about our profession talked about in casual conversation wasn't always the case; I can recall times that very few people knew what occupational therapy was. I would be rich if I had a dollar for every time a patient asked me "so, are you going to help me find a job?" More and more, I am hearing our profession talked about on the news or even in the local newspaper. That excites me. We are more visible than ever and gaining more distinct value in the communities we serve!

Tell us about your unique practice setting, what do you do?

I am a cognitive behavioral provider for clients on the Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Waiver through the State of Connecticut. This is my dream job because it allows me to use my favorite part of the occupational therapy umbrella - cognitive behavioral principles - on a daily basis. I have a caseload of ABI survivors whom I work with in the community (in their homes, place of employment, or any other relevant community setting). I address client-driven goals that lead to the improvement of their quality of life. I spend much time coordinating with multiple members of the treatment team. I've also had unique opportunities to provide staff and team trainings for behavioral staff so they can have more success using specific strategies. I truly enjoy my unique position - it is a perfect example of how versatile and special occupational therapy really is!

How do you take advantage of your state and national organization? What do you like the most about ConnOTA and where do you see potential for growth?

I maintain professional memberships. Beyond the obvious benefit of reduced CEU rates, I always remember that my dues contribute to the lobbyist and legislative action that protects our profession. As a former Vice President of ConnOTA, I was lucky enough to have a front row seat to see how tirelessly active our lobbyist is for our profession. Until I saw this in action, I never fully understood the connection between my dues and the legal protection of our profession! I appreciate that ConnOTA is always trying to stay current with their education offerings. With such a dynamic field, I admire that ConnOTA works so hard to represent all areas of this wonderful profession.

Welcome to the ConnOTA Board!



Lola Halperin

Academic Mental Health SIS Liaison

Lola will be joining our Board of Directors as the Academic Mental Health SIS Liaison. Lola Halperin, EdD, OTR/L is an Assistant Professor in the Graduate Occupational Therapy Program at Sacred Heart University (SHU). Her specialty is psychosocial occupational therapy, and she designs, teaches, and coordinates the mental health curriculum. Dr. Halperin has served children, adolescents, and adults affected by mental health conditions and other forms of adversity in inpatient, outpatient, and community-based facilities in the United States, Canada and Israel. Dr. Halperin has created and serves as one of the OT students' supervisors in the Monday Night Social (SHU enrichment program for young adults with neurodevelopmental conditions). She also serves on the Technical Advisory Committee of the American Veterans Archaeological Recovery (AVAR). Dr. Halperin is fluent in English, Hebrew, Russian, and Lithuanian.

Madison Quirk

Administrative Assistant

Madison is excited to be a part of the ConnOTA community in her new role as Administrative Assistant. Madison has her bachelor's degree in Exercise Science from Ithaca College and recently completed her Occupational Therapy Assistant education at CT State Manchester, where she served as the President of the Student Occupational Therapy Association. Outside of ConnOTA, she teaches group fitness classes and is currently pursuing her YTT 200 through Yoga in Our City.



Amy Burton

President Elect

Amy is proud to serve ConnOTA and her professional community as President, starting in July 2024. She has served on the ConnOTA board for several terms, first as the Member for Professional Development (MPD), organizing and hosting conferences. After her tenure as the MPD, Amy served as the ConnOTA Vice President.

Outside of ConnOTA, Amy is the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs and Assistant Professor of Occupational Therapy at Western New England University. She is a certified yoga instructor and uses this as a way to support student mental health and wellbeing at work. She has committed her career to the area of pediatrics and has conducted much of her research on interprofessional practice and social and emotional learning for individuals in preschool through adulthood.



Anne Koba

Membership Co-Chair

Anne has over 30 years of experience in occupational therapy. She has a Bachelor's of Science in Occupational Therapy from Quinnipiac University, and a Master's of Science in Special Education with a concentration in Assistive Technology from Southern Connecticut State University. She has practiced in both school-based and early intervention settings where she has supported clients with inclusion and independence in their natural roles, routines and settings. She values team collaboration, and client-centered practice. Anne currently is employed as a full-time assistant professor at the University of Hartford in the Occupational Therapy Program. She embraces her work as a teacher and mentor as she helps others grow in their occupational therapy practice.



Who is: The ConnOTA President?

Tell us about your role within ConnOTA?

The role of President includes being responsible for ensuring that the activities and objectives of the association are conducted and communicated to all constituents, exemplifying the highest standards of OT practice in the state. I act as the conduit between our state and national organizations including speaking on behalf of CT constituents at AOTA annual ASAP meetings at national conference to make informed voting decisions based on feedback from CT practitioners.

What is your vision in your role in ConnOTA?

As the first ConnOTA president that is an OTA, I am hopeful other OT Assistants see this as an opportunity to branch out into leadership roles. My vision is to support the mission of an inclusive community that represents the input and the skillset of the diverse group of OT practitioners in CT.

Tell us your why, why did you choose this profession?

How long have you been a practitioner.

My grandfather was a WW2 veteran who stepped on a landmine and lost a leg – because of him, disability was a part of my childhood and family experience. Growing up and witnessing how others treated and responded to his circumstances, sparked my interest in healthcare and disability awareness. Later in life he had a stroke and received home occupational therapy services, it was seeing an OT in action that gave me the push to change my goal of being a marine biologist, to being an occupational therapist.



What are you doing as an OT right now?

I am utilizing my OT skills in a non-traditional role, helping people with cognitive change co-create post-diagnostic plans. I assist people with long range planning to age well, redefining living with dementia.

How long have you been an ConnOTA member?

During my role as a fieldwork coordinator, I became a ConnOTA member- this role required me to demonstrate the distinct value of a state organization, and how could I do that without being a member?!? However, throughout my career I have experience the value of this association. I was working as a brand new OTA when significant insurance cuts were voted in, I felt the impact of reimbursement changes in the lives of my clients – I became more invested in being a part of an organization that has a lobbyist that helps navigate insurance reimbursement and advocates for OT services on our behalf.

What is the biggest challenge you have faced since joining ConnOTA?

Creating an inclusive board that represents our very wide array of constituents: treating OT's and OTA's, students, and those in academics. Facilitating a space that feels empowering to all and accurately representing the unique needs of all whom ConnOTA serves.

What are some things you love to do outside of work and ConnOTA?

I love attending live concerts. I'm also a foodie so finding new places to dine is a huge passion of mine. At the end of the day my favorite thing to do is spend time with my husband and son and cuddling with my rescue dog Phoebe.

Join Us: Become a Board Member!

Current open board member positions:

- Vice President
- Treasurer
- Government Affairs Co-Chair

Please indicate your interest for one of these positions by submitting a letter of interest to info@connota.org. You will be contacted to complete a nomination application and will receive a detailed position description.



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