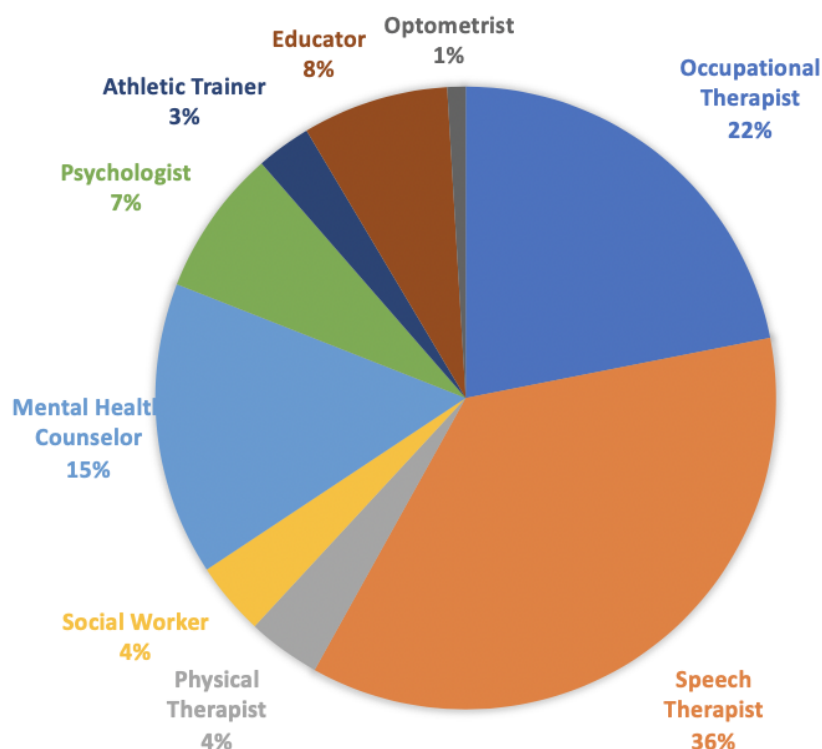


Welcome to Therapists for Armenia!



...So what's this group all about? In an effort to connect clinicians with Armenia, I have created this Facebook group, Therapists for Armenia. I have been very lucky in my ability to volunteer in Armenia and meet some amazing clinicians there. I have connected with Armenian therapists who taught me new skills to develop my skills as a clinician, and I have met professionals who seek extra support and assistance from the international community. In the States, I have met therapists who had similar experiences in Armenia and are thirsty for more, as well as therapists who want to get involved but don't know where to start. So here you go- one place we can all go to meet, connect, collaborate, and share! At our jobs we strive to coordinate with our colleagues for a multidisciplinary approach to provide for holistic care and client-centered interventions. This group was set up in the same

manner. The chart below shows how diverse our group is! And we are still expanding- 160 members in 4 months! (New members are always welcome of course!) We have a lot to learn from each other. Let's work together to help our patients, students, and clients. I hope this group will create a strong community of therapists united in their passion for Armenia.



Fun facts about our members:

- ★ 9 professions
- ★ 5 countries
- ★ 13 states

Things to look forward to

- Webinar series
- Virtual meet & greets
- Sharing of resources
- ...And much more!

Table of Contents

Occupational Therapy Month	Page 3
Who's Who- Meet Some of Our OT Members	Page 4
Member Highlights	
Corinne Ozbek: The Road to OT, Then and Now	Page 8
Mineh Badmagharian: Returning Home to Armenia	Page 9
Tips for New Graduates and Therapists	Page 11
The Untold Impact of COVID-19	
My Experience as an OT During COVID-19	Page 13
Transitioning to Telehealth as an Early Intervention OT	Page 14
Self-Care Tips for Therapists	Page 15
How to Get Through Remote Learning	Page 16
Important Announcements	Page 17
Contact Information	Page 17

April is National Occupational Therapy Month!



What is Occupational Therapy?

Occupational therapy (OT) aims to help people become independent in their occupations, which are activities a person performs throughout their day. This includes things you need to do to survive, what you want to do for leisure and enjoyment, and what you are expected to do to fulfill a role (i.e. job, caregiver, student, etc.). Occupational therapists evaluate how disability impacts performance. A big part of OT is activity analysis to analyze various factors that impact occupations:

- Person: The physical, cognitive, sensory, and emotional skills of the client (What are their strengths and weaknesses?)
- Environment: The physical, social, and cultural environment (What can be changed or eliminated?)
- Occupation: Self-care, work, leisure, play, education, etc. (Can the activity be simplified or changed to meet the level of optimal performance?)

Treatment focuses on relearning or teaching a new way to perform an activity, strengthening physical, mental, or social skills required to complete an activity, making modifications to the environment, or providing adaptive tools to make an activity easier to perform independently (Cole, 2008). The ultimate goal of occupational therapy is to promote independence, health, and well-being for quality of life.

Cole, M. B., Tufano, R. (2008). The person-environment-occupation-performance model. In *Applied theories in occupational therapy: A practical approach* (pp.127-128). Thorofare, NJ: SLACK Incorporated.

Who's Who? Meet Some of Our OT Members!



Victoria Armineh Babikian- NY, USA (Founder of Therapists for Armenia)

Armineh has a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Master's degree in Occupational Therapy. She has experience working in clinical research, psychiatric hospitals, and skilled nursing facilities. She currently works at Premier HealthCare in Manhattan, an outpatient rehabilitation and medical clinic for individuals across the lifespan who have intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), including Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down's Syndrome, and Cerebral Palsy. There she is involved in a grant that works with primary care providers (doctors, nurses, dentists, dental hygienists), behavioral therapists, and OTs to help desensitize IDD individuals to tolerate routine medical and dental check-ups without the use of restraints and anesthetics. She also works at numerous preschools throughout Manhattan providing school-based OT to

children ages 3-5. She has presented at national and international conferences, and has publications in OT Practice magazine and the Armenian Journal of Special Education.

Armineh is very passionate about disability services in Armenia. Over the past four years she has volunteered with Children of Armenia Fund, Fund for Armenian Relief, My Way Educational and Rehabilitation Center, and Kharberd Specialized Home for Children. She has hosted workshops about inclusive education and low tech strategies for skill development in children with disabilities and delays. She recently authored a book titled "Occupational Therapy Guidebook to Inclusion" which is being translated into Armenian for clinicians and caregivers of children with disabilities.

Corinne Ozbek- NY, USA

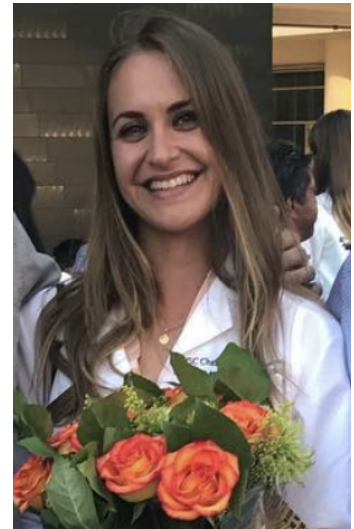
Corinne graduated from New York University and has been practicing OT for 6 years. She has worked with predominantly pediatric populations, such as a private practice sensory gym, clinic, and preschool. Corinne currently works for the NYC Department of Education in a "D75" Special Education program with high school students. She has volunteered in Armenia through ABGU-YSIP working with children with disabilities in an orphanage in Yerevan. She helped develop a special education curriculum to teach the children with disabilities the English Language. She continues to be involved in the Armenian community in New York as a board member of the AGBU Young Professionals of New York.



Melina Allahverdian- CA, USA

Melina is a yoga teacher and self-trained chef. She knew I wanted to spend her days helping people with their day-to-day lives. She entered the field of occupational therapy because she wanted to learn about the influencing factors that work to create a balanced lifestyle of health and wellness. She wanted to be trained in a field dedicated to helping individuals regardless of their situation or background and empower them in their ability to engage in meaningful occupations and create a life inspired with purpose.

Currently Melina is a doctoral resident at the University of Southern California Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice where she works with patients diagnosed with chronic conditions. This clinic specializes in lifestyle factors and how they impact symptom management in order to help patients build health-promoting daily routines and increase their self-efficacy. Melina predominantly works with individuals recovering from concussion or diagnoses including chronic migraine, anxiety, stress, ADHD, and eating disorders. Additionally, she is involved in a research project which looks at how mindfulness techniques can help healthcare providers prevent stress, fatigue, and burnout.



Alissa Bonjuklian- NY, USA

Alissa has been an occupational therapist for 7 years in the field of physical rehabilitation, specifically in the clinical setting of subacute rehabilitation and home care. Since 2018 she has been employed full-time for the largest nonprofit home care agency in NYC, Visiting Nurse Service of NY. She provides in-home occupational therapy services to elderly patients in Manhattan. Additionally she works part-time at Midtown Medical Healthcare, an outpatient physical therapy clinic. Last year, she launched her own company, Silver Slippers, which connects homebound senior citizens in NYC with dance instructors for private dance lessons.

Ruzan Khachikyan- Yerevan, Armenia

Ruzan has a Bachelor in Correction Pedagogy and Special Psychology from Armenian State Pedagogical University with a specialization in Occupational Therapy, as well as a Masters degree in Psychology from Yerevan State University. Ruzan has been working as an occupational therapist since 2012 at My way Educational and Rehabilitation Centre for Autistic children and also provides private therapy. From 2017 to 2018 she worked in Luxembourg, providing private therapy to children with Autism and worked closely with a European university there.





Gayane Hovhannisyan- Yerevan, Armenia

Gayane is a pediatric occupational therapist. She received her Bachelor's degree from Armenian State Pedagogical University in Yerevan. After 7 years of working in the field, she started to pursue her graduate degree through the European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy. She hopes to graduate this year. She has worked in various settings and countries. She recently developed a mobile application called "noomee" for families and therapists of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, which provides visual templates and social stories to increase independence with daily activities. The app has won numerous grants and international competitions. It is currently being tested in the market, with plans to be released soon for public use on mobile app stores.

Ani Sarkissians- CA, USA

Ani is currently working on a Master's degree in Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy from the University of Southern California. She is originally from New Jersey, but her passion for holistic health led her to Los Angeles, where she has resided for the past nine years. Ani is trained and certified in working with disorders of the digestive system and believes in living a balanced life. She has experience working as a Behavioral Interventionist working in both school and home-based settings. After graduation, Ani hopes to specialize in sensory integration and school-based OT. She believes that each child has a unique purpose and enjoys helping them work up to their highest potential. In her free time, Ani enjoys spending time with her friends and family, being active, and exploring California with her fiancé.



Rubina Boyrazian- IN, USA

In 2019, Rubina had the privilege of working with two amazing organizations in Armenia to complete her occupational therapy doctoral capstone project. She worked with Teach Me More (TMM) autism clinic where she helped with families and children ages 3-16. She also partnered with the Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) to present about child development and sensory processing disorder for their professionals in the villages. She is looking forward to the day that she can return to Armenia. Rubina completed her OTD last year and now works in early intervention doing home care with children ages 0-3.



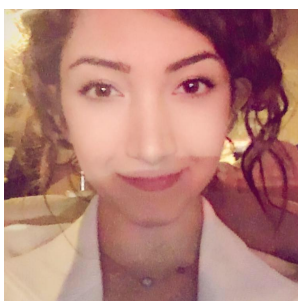
Tatev Ghazaryan- Yerevan, Armenia

Tatev has a bachelor's degree in OT and a master's degree in psychology. Her professional career as an OT started in 2013 at Specialized Children Home of Kharberd, followed by 2 years at "Full life" NGO's Independent Living Center for disabled children and adolescents. She also did private therapy, specializing in working with children with Cerebral Palsy and Autism Spectrum Disorder. In 2016, Tatev collaborated with international organizations like UNICEF Armenia and Save the children to develop methodological guidelines and organize trainings on implementing WHO-ICF-CY during evaluations and interventions for children with disabilities. She continues as an ICF consultant with Child Development Foundation, Emili Aregak support and resource center for people with disabilities, and Full Life NGO's Stepanavan and Tashir branches.

Currently Tatev works at the Agency of Medical and Social Expertise of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs for the Republic of Armenia. She provides workplace adjustments and adaptations for people with disabilities. She is also a lecturer at Armenian State Pedagogical University (ASPU), where she is working on her dissertation as a PhD candidate in the department of speech and rehabilitation therapy. She also is the founder and CEO of "Easy Touch," a new social entrepreneurship which is going to produce adaptive clothes for people with disabilities.

Ani Bournazian- VA, USA (Currently in Gyumri, Armenia)

Ani recently graduated from Columbia University with her Master's in Occupational Therapy. She completed clinical experiences working with homeless adults providing group therapy, a skilled nursing facility and a pediatric private practice. After receiving her OT license in February, she started Birthright Armenia and is currently in Gyumri. During this quarantine period, she virtually presented to the staff at "Agate Rights Center for Women with Disabilities" educating them the importance and purpose of occupational therapy services, as well as recommended adaptive equipment and exercises for their members. She is also beginning to adapt English language instruction for people with speech and auditory challenges.



Mineh Badmagharian- CA, USA (Currently in Yerevan, Armenia)

Mineh received her Bachelor's degree in Psychology, MS in Occupational Therapy, and will be completing her OTD this year from University of Southern California. She is specializing in mental health and is currently completing her residency at the Intra Mental Health Center in Yerevan.

Member Highlights

The Road to OT, Then and Now

By Corinne Ozbek, MS, OTR/L



My passion towards the field of occupational therapy truly runs deep. As an eager high school student ready to embark upon college and the “real world,” I found myself at a young age sincerely empathizing with people with disabilities. A feeling of “I just know I have to do something to help” overcame me and never left. In hindsight, my earliest interactions with people with disabilities would stand as the foundation for the kind of therapist I would become today. Time and time again, I recall becoming deeply shaken when noticing the “looks” individuals with physical disabilities would receive from community members. From then on, I made the decision to do my part- I wanted to change disability culture and help individuals with disabilities rise above their limitations. I entered college knowing I would continue on to graduate school to become an Occupational Therapist (OT). My heart was set on the impact I could make and I have never looked back.

In preparation for this career, I ventured out in pursuit of experience and knowledge. In 2009, I participated in AGBU’s YSIP (Yerevan Summer Internship Program) where I worked with children with disabilities in an orphanage in Yerevan. I helped to develop a special education curriculum to teach the English language to children with disabilities. There was no greater moment that I could pinpoint in my life that was more rewarding than this.

Today I proudly stand before you as a therapist with over 6 years of clinical experience. My professional path has led me to gain experience in predominantly pediatric populations, such as a private practice sensory gym, clinic, and preschool. I now work for the Department of Education (DOE) in NYC in a “D75” Special Education program with high school students.

My role in this setting is to uphold and facilitate independence amongst my students in the highest regard. New York State laws dictate that a student is eligible to receive special education services from ages 3 to 21 years old. For many of my high school students, this means that they are able to be supported by a structured educational environment until their 21st year. Unfortunately for students with severe learning disabilities, cognitive delays, developmental delays, or for those living with physical disabilities such as Cerebral Palsy, the notion of life after formal schooling can be a daunting one. As a result, this place becomes the “last stop” for schooling and consistent therapeutic practice.

School-based OT is geared towards enhancing and facilitating a student’s ability to fully access and be successful in the learning environment. We help students actively engage in learning, participate in all aspects of school life and ultimately, achieve their highest potential. The overarching theme of therapy becomes “be the best student you can be.”

I use meaningful activities to help students and young adults participate in school-related tasks. This can vary from taking jackets on and off, writing, reading, performing mathematical calculations, eating lunch, using the bathroom, socializing with other students, following a teacher's directions, and more.

OTs support students to manage themselves within the classroom environment in order to promote learning, physical and mental health, and overall well being. We work on a variety of different skill sets including but not limited to: executive function skills, sensory regulation strategies, handwriting, visual-motor/eye-hand coordination skills, coping skills, social participation, self-care skills, and employment skills. Oftentimes I find myself creating adaptations or compensatory strategies for students who have met their capacity and remediation of a skill is just not therapeutically practical. These strategies include adapting the educational environment (e.g. different seating arrangement, type of chair/desk, etc.), modifying the curriculum (e.g. simplifying homework assignments, different grading system), supporting task-related accommodations (e.g. longer test times, , and assisting in transitioning to post-graduation settings).

For those students who participate in Inclusion Programs, OT supports them in fulfilling basic responsibilities at their vocational job sites through repetition and job training. Moreover, it's imperative that occupational therapy services are embedded during the routines of the naturally occurring school day, as they are most beneficial when conducted in the least restrictive environment. In short, OTs in a high school setting become the lifeline for families and students with disabilities to optimize their function before transitioning out of special education services.

Returning Home to Armenia

By Mineh Badmagharian, MS, OTR/L

My journey to Armenia began in the summer of 2012 with my participation in Birthright Armenia. Just having completed my Bachelor's degree in Psychology, I felt lost and confused. I was actively seeking an experience that would make me feel alive. A visit to my homeland for the first time helped give me a purpose and meaning to continue moving forward.

I vividly remember waking up in my host family's house with a sense of belonging and joy. It wasn't long before my daily routine significantly shifted. Most of the occupations I used to engage in Los Angeles were put on hold. I was no longer driving, working full time, taking classes, and communicating in my third language of English. I now had to figure out public transportation, walk to most of my destinations, and learn to communicate in Armenian. New occupations and routines emerged and my roles adapted. I was no longer a student and an employee, but an intern and, most importantly, a younger sister and a granddaughter to my host "Papik."

My engagement in new occupations was how I became familiar, understood, and was able to dive deep into my culture. A new identity was slowly starting to form as I danced, made dolma, created art, and drank lots and lots of Armenian coffee.

With my interest in psychology and mental health, I was continually trying to figure out the mental health system in Armenia. As I started to find answers to my questions, it became evident to me that the stigma surrounding mental health was negatively impacting many individuals in Armenia. The shame and guilt surrounding mental health challenges created isolation and neglect. That was when I made the decision to one-day return to Armenia and contribute to changing perspectives towards this issue. However, I had no idea how.

Years later, upon completion of my Master's degree in Occupational Therapy at USC I made the decision to enroll in the Doctoral Program. I learned about the role of OT in mental health- we help individuals learn how to manage their medication, create safety plans, increase their independence in self-care, learn skills necessary for employment or studies, and enhance cognitive and psychosocial skills that impact their daily routines through individual or group therapy. Following my passion for mental health, I researched ways to do my residency in Armenia. I found the Intra Mental Health Center in Yerevan. It was a perfect fit! This community center offers a variety of services, including a day program for adults with mental health challenges. This helped make my dream of coming back to Armenia a reality.



Stepping out of my comfort zone was difficult though. I did not know what to expect. It had been 8 years since I was last in Armenia. Moving there, living alone for many months- this was a new challenge I was going to face. However, I was welcomed very quickly and reminded of the sense of belonging I had felt during my previous visit. Upon entering the Intra Mental Health Center, I immediately felt overjoyed. I was mesmerized seeing multiple art pieces created by members that were displayed all over the center. After the first day, from observations alone, I knew that I had made the right decision to return to Armenia.

This time, I have a better understanding of occupations and their impact on a person's wellbeing. I am able to engage in culturally specific activities to create meaningful connections. Simply sitting around a table sharing a cup of coffee has become my favorite new way of socializing. And it helps to create a safe trusting environment and make strong therapeutic connections. I also am privileged to be able to collaborate with a team of clinicians that are filled with tolerance, kindness, and love. This has been instrumental for our community to be able to harness connections and bring necessary changes to move the field forward in Armenia.

This journey has been filled with opportunities for learning and growth both personally and as a clinician. Learning about my culture and its unique role in providing clinical services has been very empowering. I have been soaking in my heritage and understanding how resilient my culture is. I can proudly say that coming back home has helped me develop the skills I need to become the therapist I always wanted to be.

Tips for New Graduates and Therapists

By Corinne Ozbek, MS, OTR/L

Congratulations to those of you who are en route to completing your OT programs or newly graduated! You have chosen such a rewarding facet of healthcare that directly impacts an individual's life at its core. Just know that you will always leave work with an immense sense of personal gratification for the students and individuals who depend upon you. Below are a few tips and strategies to ensure professional success in your future endeavors:



FIND YOUR BEST FIT: It takes trial and error to find the “just-right” employment setting that showcases your personal strengths as a therapist. Fast paced? Team environment? Population specific? Pick your first job and the people you work with like you were choosing parents. Look for a supportive, encouraging, positive and nurturing environment that can bring out the best in you. Just like other aspects of life, a positive environment will lay the strongest foundation for you to grow, learn, establish your skills, and increase self-confidence throughout your career.



GET INVOLVED: As clinicians, we are blessed to be supported by larger organizations that govern our profession and bring us all together for continued growth in our field. With that said - join your local, national, and international OT organizations! While many require a yearly membership fee, the rewards will surely outweigh the cost. Organizations such as the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) grant members unique access to research and continued education so that you can stay up to date on evidence-based practice. They also offer helpful resources for clinicians of all levels, advance standards of practice, and serve as advocates for our field.



NETWORK: As a new therapist entering the professional world, taking the initiative to meet other like-minded clinicians is very important. You've already embarked upon a wonderful, close-knit community of other OTs just by joining Therapists for Armenia! Do your part by stepping outside your comfort zone and introducing yourself to other clinicians. It's a wonderful way to gain helpful insight from someone with experience in the field. The opportunities are endless as the OT network is truly a warm, welcoming and unified entity! You can form professional connections in a multitude of ways - such as by joining local support groups, reaching out to local clinics and keeping in touch with your school professors or clinical instructors from fieldwork. I, for one, did just that! My very first “dream job” as an OT in a Preschool Setting in NYC was a direct result of reaching out to my former Fieldwork Level 1 Supervisor upon graduating from Grad School! Be sure to maintain a positive and professional attitude as you enter meetings and group events. I encourage you to think of it as though you're always in an interview for a new job. You never know when or where a therapist is seeking a new hire!



GET ORGANIZED: You will thank me later for this :) Now is the chance for you to start building your OT library and toolbox of treatment modalities. Whether you are entering a Skilled Nursing Facility, hospital or pediatric setting, you will want to have resources readily accessible to either use for treatment or refer back to for rationale and evidence based practice. Something that helped me immensely in preparation for working in a special education school setting was making *Themed Binders* full of worksheets, handouts and activities that were organized by treatment skill set. For instance, binders included treatment areas covering: Fine motor skills, Visual-motor skills/Eye-hand coordination, Gross motor skills, Visual-perceptual skills and Parent Education. I took this concept one step further by also organizing my electronic files/resources by the same categories. Now, all I have to do is open up a certain folder on the computer to pull up a worksheet for a student. It single handedly makes my day run so smoothly!



ASK QUESTIONS: Stepping out into the “unknown” that is the work place of your choosing can be a little unnerving. Let this sink in- it’s absolutely okay not to have all the answers or be a little unsure of how to go about treatment planning for a difficult, complex patient. Don't get caught up in what you don't know! I remember the early days in my career when I'd be crippled with anxiety over not quite knowing how to proceed. I promise you that confidence will come with time and experience. Don't be afraid to ask questions and seek advice from other therapists. Be a self-directed learner and seek out the information you need. You can even join forces with a mentor. We've all been there and chances are, there IS an answer to your question. Your occupational therapy professors can also serve as a great resource to provide guidance on how to navigate your first year as a therapist. They can refer you to job openings within your area of interest, or be a wonderful reference on your resume.



OBSERVE, LEARN & GROW: Make sure to spend time working with and observing as many different therapists as you can. Everyone uses different approaches, techniques, and ideas for treatment. In your career, you may find yourself embodying the culmination of that “little bit” you took from each and every inspirational clinician around you.

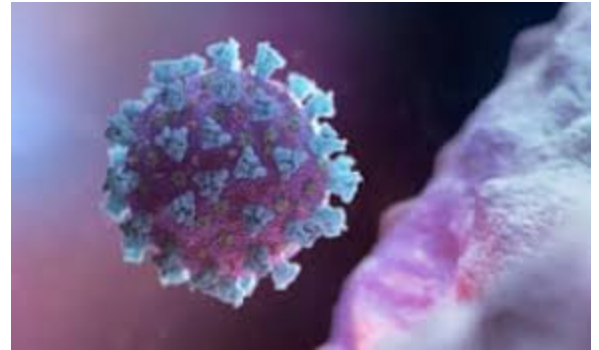


The Untold Impact of COVID-19

My Experience as an OT During COVID-19

By Alissa Bonjuklian, MS, OTR/L

COVID-19 has dramatically affected my ability to provide therapy services. Most notable is the drastic decrease in patient volume. On one hand, I have treated patients with certain diagnoses who absolutely require physical, occupational, and/or speech therapy. These patients have been very grateful to have clinicians who are still providing these services despite the risk of COVID-19. On the other hand, there has been an even larger number of patients and family members who have chosen to decline therapy services due to concern regarding transmission of the virus. This diminished patient volume has caused some uncomfortable business decisions including staff cuts and furlough.



The necessity of occupational, physical, and speech therapy has lately been a hotly-debated topic. Some view our services as vital, while others question if therapy can be delayed until safer work conditions can be achieved. I feel that the need for our professional services depends mostly on the type of clinical setting in which the therapist works, as well as the unique situational needs of each patient. For example, therapists in hospitals have played a critical role in recommending safe positioning strategies and promoting early mobility to keep people off ventilators and regain their strength. Therapists in home care aim to promote safe home environment setup, to help prevent falls when patients are in a weakened state, and to increase patients' adherence to their Home Exercise Program.

Further complicating the issue is that many of my peers in healthcare, including myself, have either contracted the virus or have demonstrated questionable physical symptoms necessitating precautionary quarantine, some with more dire outcomes than others. Lack of personal protective equipment (PPE), including N95 masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer, as well as lack of widespread testing have further contributed to the remaining strained "skeleton crew."

Luckily we have felt the warm and sincere efforts of the community: good samaritans have pitched in astounding volunteer efforts including home production of masks and face shields as well as the provision of meals to keep essential workers safe and well-fed. Indeed, within 2 hours of posting on social media lamenting the PPE shortage, a friend of my former roommate hand-delivered a face shield to my doorstep (of course taking proper steps to sanitize it before it was put to use!)

Despite these times of uncertainty, I try to maintain a positive outlook, comforted by the belief that this struggle is temporary. Suffering is part of the human experience. Humans in general, and certainly we as Armenians, have endured and survived intense hardship. We will overcome and grow stronger from these experiences!

Transitioning to Telehealth as an Early Intervention Occupational Therapist- Putting Parents in the “Hot Seat”

By Rubina Boyrazian, OTD, OTR/L

I’m still in my first year of practice as an OT! The abrupt transition to telehealth was not an easy one, but I’m excited to share the good and the bad. I work in early intervention, going from home to home and working with children ages 0-3 years old and their parent(s). The goal of early intervention is to train and support parents on a weekly basis to help them understand how to guide their child to meet developmental goals with methods that are realistic to their home environment.



I love this concept since it allows the therapist to enter homes and put together a full picture of the child’s life including barriers and supports that are easily missed when the child comes to see a therapist in the clinic. Also, this puts parents in a comfortable environment which allows them to be more hands-on with their child. In theory, this will help parents smoothly transfer therapeutic strategies into the child’s daily life instead of expecting change to occur within a one-hour therapy session out of a 168 hour week.

Unfortunately, our in-home therapy sessions aren’t perfect. Parents are running after their other children, they take a phone call, or are finishing up dinner...life must go on. Sometimes, no matter how many times you ask for them to participate in the session, to them you are a very expensive “babysitter.” We get it, we understand, it’s not ideal. This may be the parent’s only “break” from their child. So occasionally, we give in.

Once the seriousness of COVID-19 and the quarantine orders came into effect, our company scrambled to get everything organized to begin virtual therapy sessions. We are extremely fortunate that most insurance companies allowed us to change our format, even though teletherapy was yet to be officially approved for early intervention OT.

In a matter of days, I contacted nearly 40 families I work with to market virtual therapy. I went from therapist to saleswoman in an instant. I am currently on week 6 of virtual therapy sessions and my caseload continues to change with parents willing to try out online services or deciding to take a break. The cancellations rate is high and usually comes in the form of a text message from the parent right before our scheduled start time. As a therapist this is quite frustrating. Even if I didn’t need to drive over to a family’s home, I still took considerable time to review the child’s goals, create a plan for our one-hour session, and prepare myself to be ready for service.

As I share my frustrations, I also want to note that I understand and I sympathize with these families. I don’t claim to know everything going on in your home life, I don’t know all the barriers or stressors they’re dealing with day to day. I hope they see me and my services as a positive support for their child and family. With that said, cancellations remain difficult. Cancellations set us back and create inconsistencies for the child. And unfortunately, cancellations also mean I don’t get paid. The topic of pay is not an easy subject for me to discuss, as I can imagine other therapists feel the same way. No, we did not go into our respective fields for the money. However, we need to survive this too. I end each

day having worked longer hours than before, including driving from house to house! This is due to the extensive paperwork, consent forms, reports, and logging we are required to do in America. And no, none of it is billable time (billable time = time you get paid for. When working contract jobs as opposed to full-time, you only get paid for time spent *with* patients).

Week to week it seems that I learn a bit more, I become a bit more efficient, and then life throws me a new monkey wrench and I need to start over. But nonetheless, we look forward, we adapt, we persevere. It is what makes any good therapist, we are flexible and ready to adjust as we go! I've connected with more colleagues in the last month than the last eight months since starting work. The ability to talk to someone who understands has made all the difference in coping with the craziness.

In light of dealing with these twists and turns, I can proudly say with a warmest smile on my face that my children continue to make progress and are thriving. Because of the nature of virtual sessions, the parents and caregivers naturally become the driving force behind every intervention. They are truly in the "therapist's hot seat" now. Almost every session brings a lightbulb moment as parents become a partner in the thinking process of how to motivate and increase the participation of their child. Also, the carryover of activities and interventions from therapy to daily life is all of sudden a very smooth transition. I'm excited to continue virtual therapy, but definitely cannot wait for the day that I can re-enter homes and greet my families in person.

Teletherapy helped me develop a few new tools for my toolbelt. Perhaps once everything resolves the virtual model will continue to be an option for early intervention occupational therapists. Especially in instances when someone in the household is ill or if a conventional time does not work with a family's schedule. I'm thankful for my colleagues, the company I work for, as well as all other therapists who came together when we needed each other most. We continue to support each other without fail.

Self Care Tips for Therapists

By Melina Allahverdian, MS, OTR/L

Keep it simple. Only you know what your self-care truly is. It does not have to look a certain way, does not have to cost money, and it does not have to take a lot of time or effort.

Become mindfully aware of the moments in your day when you feel fulfilled and restored, even if it lasts for one minute. It could be as easy as pausing to smell your morning coffee and letting yourself enjoy the sensations for a few minutes.

It's okay if the self-care actually starts there... noticing if there is time and space in your day for those moments to even occur. Now might be the fun opportunity to get creative and see what you inspire for yourself!

Whatever your self-care is, allow yourself to enjoy it without guilt and prioritize the time for it as you would patient care. Even the research shows that when healthcare providers take the time to practice this, their quality of life increases as does the patient care we are so passionate about delivering.



How to Get Through Remote Learning

By Tamar Merjian, MS, LMHC

Whether you are a student, parent, or therapist, we are all dealing with the transition to remote learning and working. Here are a few tips to help you cope with this new reality and maintain your mental and physical health.

- Make your bed
- Maintain a routine: wake up at the same time, brush your teeth, have breakfast
- Change out of those sweatpants and get dressed, this is imperative to mental health!
- Create a tranquil, organized, working space whether it is your office or school
- Parents- talk to your children about what is going on and why it's so important.
- Students- follow your school schedule. Most schools are maintaining their daily schedule, on Google classroom or Zoom, follow it. If you're supposed to have PE that day, exercise, if you have art, do something creative if assignments are not provided. Parents can print out schedules with visuals to help children stay on track.
 - Teachers, administration, and support staff are all working hard during this time and here for you now more than ever, don't be afraid to reach out to them even if it is just to say hi.
- While children are at "school," if a parent is working from home, it is a good idea to work while they're in class. Lead by example.
- By nature, we're social beings. Technology has allowed us to bridge that gap during this time whether it's Google classroom, Zoom, or Facetime. Take time to talk to friends and colleagues.
- It's ok to feel scared, anxious, overwhelmed, this is a confusing time for everyone, but be mindful- meditate, practice yoga, go for walks as a family.



Helpful Resources:

- Visual School Schedule: <https://cdn.thisreadingmama.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/VSSC-SF-TRM.pdf>
- Family Mindfulness Activity: <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/family-mindfulness-schedule.pdf>
- How to Think Positively: <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/cbt-thinking-errors.pdf>
- Ocean breathing for Children: <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/adhd-kangaroo-packet.pdf>

Important Announcements

Webinar Series Coming Up- Save the Date!



Webinars will be on Saturdays 9-11 am PST, 12-2 pm EST, 8-10 pm GMT +4 (Armenia).
Details coming soon

- May 9 “Experiences as a Parent of a Child with Autism”
- May 16 “Comparing Occupational Therapy in Armenia and America”
- May 23 “Comparing Speech Therapy in Armenia and America”

Reminder

The group is yours! If you ever want to share anything, feel free to post on the page. Please invite friends and colleagues. New members are always welcome!

If you have not done so already, please take a few minutes to complete this [short survey](#) so I can gather information about our members and tailor the group to meet everyone’s needs.

Looking For...

Some volunteers to help with English to Armenian translation for newsletters, posts, webinar presentations, etc. I want the content to be understandable and available to all. Please let me know if you are interested.

Contact Information

I always want to hear from our members! Ideas, questions, requests, suggestions- anything at all! Feel free to email me at BabikianOTRL@gmail.com.

THANK YOU!!!!

Thank you to everyone who contributed to our first ever Therapists for Armenia newsletter! I really appreciate you taking the time to write about your experiences. Thank you for reading and supporting this venture, I hope it was enjoyable! Looking forward to sharing the continued growth of our members.