Taking Care of Ourselves as Healthcare Providers

By Sean Roush, OTD, OTR/L

As health care providers, we have dedicated ourselves to serving the needs of others, often at the cost of neglect to our own mental and physical health. It’s very common for occupational therapy professionals to focus so much on the care of others that our own health and wellbeing begins to suffer. In this article I’m going to encourage everyone to step back for a moment and look at our own habits and routines in order to identify where we might be putting ourselves at risk, which ultimately puts our clients and loved ones at risk. Pressures in the health care industry have grown exponentially in recent years. Documentation demands, productivity, and staffing shortages, just to name a few, are all a perfect storm of pressure that we must all deal with that can create early burnout, low frustration tolerance, and other conditions that lead to poor health that affects our practice.

In order to combat the pressures of modern health care it’s important to be proactive and take charge of our own health, just like we encourage our clients and patients to do. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) has several documents that pertain to increasing wellness for both our clients and ourselves that are available at: https://www.samhsa.gov/wellness/strategies and http://www.integration.samhsa.gov/health-wellness/wellness-strategies/stress-management. Many of you may already use these resources with your clients, but they can also be very helpful at taking a look at our own wellness and stress responses.

One of my favorite tools from SAMHSA is the Action Planning for Prevention and Recovery self-help tool available at: https://store&dc=1415&query=Action+Planning+for+Prevention+and+Recovery. Although designed for mental health consumers, it can easily be adapted for anyone to use and has many helpful reminders to encourage mental wellness. The tool begins with creating a “wellness toolbox” where you list the kinds of things that you can do to make yourself feel good and maintain wellness. These should range from very simple and inexpensive to the more complex and time consuming. Creating this list can help to remind us of those things that are energizing and healing that we may have let go of or neglected. When creating your list, try to be as inclusive as possible and create many options for yourself. You’ll use this list as a resource to remind yourself of those things that you enjoy and should be trying to incorporate into your life.

The next step is to develop a “daily maintenance plan” that describes those things that you need to do on a regular basis to maintain both physical and mental wellness. Although this may seem too simple, after all wellness is our business, it’s important to take a little time to create our own plan because we all have a tendency to neglect our own basic needs when the stresses of daily life become overwhelming. In reality, the time when we most need to maintain our routines is often when they begin to breakdown the most. These first two steps might be enough for some of you to promote wellness, but I’d encourage continuing with the tool and creating the next 2 steps.

Step 3 is to create a list of potential “triggers” in your daily life that may create stress that leads to a decrease in wellness. We all have triggers in our daily life that can turn an excellent day into a crummy day and the first step to neutralizing them is to identify them. Once you know what they are, identify steps that you can take to...
Fingerprinting of New Applicants & Reinstatements of Lapsed licenses

The Board voted in the last meeting to require new applicants and those reinstating their lapsed license to undergo state and national background checks using fingerprint identification. The applicant will pay the cost of getting fingerprints and the State Police processing fee. This is in compliance with ORS 676.303. Procedures are in process for adoption.

OTLB honors Mashelle; Welcomes new OT Assistant member, Kari

The May 5th Board meeting sadly marked Board Chair Mashelle Painter’s last meeting after 8 years as a member of the OTLB. Mashelle started on the Board on 7/1/09 and final term ends on 6/30/17.

With over 30 years working in the OT profession, as faculty at Linn-Benton, working in pediatrics and schools, sitting on the NBCOT Board and the AOTA Commission on Practice, Mashelle’s contributions to the OTLB were countless. Mashelle was instrumental in setting policy on the role of the OTA in the therapy process and addressing the numerous questions the Board receives on supervision. This is in addition to her many Board responsibilities such as overseeing meetings, monitoring budgets, reviewing discipline cases, and sitting on workgroups, such as school caseloads.

Thank you for your service to the OTLB and the State of Oregon, Mashelle! We appreciate your dedication, expertise, and leadership.

Welcome Kari Hill! Kari is taking Mashelle’s place as the OT Assistant member on the board beginning 7/1/17.

Kari has been practicing as a school therapist for nearly 20 years. Most recently she has expanded her therapy skills to include working in sub-acute settings (such as skilled nursing homes) and as an adjunct lab instructor for the Linn Benton OTA program. In 2012, she received the Michelle Smith Sullivan “Exemplary Therapist Assistant” of the year award for Oregon school therapy assistants, nominated by her co-workers and presented with the award at TIES.

Kari’s experience and broad background will make her an excellent member of the OTLB. Over the past year, Kari has already attended Board meetings and participated in the Use of Aides workgroup. The Board is thrilled to have Kari as its newest member.

With Mashelle’s departure, Linda Harthun Smith will assume the role of Board Chair and Sybil Hedrick Park will become Vice Chair of the Board.

2017 Legislative Session Update:

The end of the legislative session is approaching and June 2nd marked the deadline bills had to be voted out of its 2nd committee. Many bills affecting OT / tracked by the Board did not make it out and will not move forward. Among these were the bills on loan repayment, school caseloads, hippotherapy, and requiring pain management CE every 4 years. The following bills are still alive:

SB 48 – Regulatory boards to adopt rules requiring practitioners to report to the board the completion of any CE related to suicide risk assessment, treatment and management. The board shall report to the OHA on even-numbered years. Passed Senate; awaiting Third reading in the House.

SB 5523 – OTLB budget bill. Signed by Governor into law.

HB 2432 / SB 255 – Directs Health Licensing Office to issue licenses to engage in practice of Art Therapy to qualified applicants. OTA lobbied for amendment so OTs utilizing art therapy in their practice will not have to obtain a license in art therapy. Signed by Governor into law.

For more information, please visit oregonlegislature.gov.
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ensure that they don’t derail you. Despite our best efforts though, sometimes the triggers still get the best of us, or new triggers come out of the blue, so we move on to step 4.

Step 4, “early warning signs”, helps us to identify the behaviors and feelings that we may have when things do start to go south. Although we may work hard to prevent it, we all get overwhelmed at times and the best way to turn things around is to identify when it’s happening right away, before our frustration or anger gets out of hand. Recognizing early warning signs that our mood or behavior is changing for the worse provides us with the opportunity to turn it around quickly, before it can have too much of a negative impact. Once you’ve identified what your early warning signs are, identify things that you can do to compensate for them and turn things around.

*Action Planning for Prevention and Recovery* includes two more steps “when things are breaking down or getting worse” and “crisis planning”, which you may also want to include in your own plan. There are some pieces of the plan, such as identifying medications or hospitals that you do or do not want to use, that may not apply to your own particular life situation. When you come across aspects that don’t fit, simply eliminate those from your plan or replace them with something that does fit.

Action plans are meant to be living documents that are revised and revisited on a regular basis so feel free to try out new things and eliminate those that don’t work as well. Try to use your plan each day to ensure that you aren’t neglecting yourself in favor of attending to the needs of others. Taking a few minutes each day to focus on our own wellness will help us to be better healthcare providers.

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**The new OTLB website is now live!**

[www.oregon.gov/otlb](http://www.oregon.gov/otlb)

**Help us improve!** Let us know what you think by completing the Survey Monkey at the top carousel. Check regularly for CE Courses under the Continuing Education tab.

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**Did your legal name change?**

**To change your name:** Go to [www.oregon.gov/otlb](http://www.oregon.gov/otlb) for the name change form or send an email to Nancy.Schuberg@state.or.us. Fax us the legal document showing the name change at 971-673-0226.

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**Are You Moving?**

**To change to your contact information:** Go to [www.oregon.gov/otlb](http://www.oregon.gov/otlb) for the address change form or send an email to Rachel.Cillo@state.or.us.

**To order a verification to be sent to another state:** email Nancy.Schuberg@state.or.us and give the exact address where it needs to be sent. There is No Charge. We do not need their form. We will email you back when it is done.