

# Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Kuzhilethu “Shep” Kshepakaran, M. Ed., OTR/L, CAPS, FAOTA

By Roxana Chirinos, OTS & Carly Derouin, OTS

## Introduction

### Purpose

- This life history is one of other life history interviews which are a part of a larger project, Life Histories of Individuals Who Have Been Influential in Developing Occupational Therapy (OT) in North Dakota.
- The purpose of the project is to gather information about the history and evolution of OT practice through life histories of individuals who have been influential in developing the OT profession. This study is intended to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists a view of the history and how OT practice has evolved from its inception to current practice in North Dakota.

## Description of Participant

Shep graduated in 1960 and received a diploma in Occupational Therapy at the University of Nagpur, Maharashtra India. In 1975, he received his masters from the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington. Shep dedicated his time to teach occupational therapy at the Chicago State University. Shep served as a member of the Roster of Accreditation Evaluator for the Accreditation council of Occupational Therapy Education and served as an NBCOT item writer. Shep has been a recipient of numerous achievements and service awarded from the AOTA and the Asian/Pacific Heritage Occupational Therapy Association. He believes strongly in the importance of including cultures, minority groups, and societies within the occupational therapy setting. His memorable roles have included chief of therapeutic activities for D.C. Village in Washington, D.C., chief occupational therapist for Bon-Hooghly Hospitals in India, occupational therapist for the Jewish Chronic Disease Hospital in New York City, and superintendent for the Home for Handicapped Children in India.



## Timeline Literature Review

- According to AOTA (nd):
- In 1955 AOTA published the “Policy of Advanced Study” reinforcing the idea that OT should maintain competence by completing continued education.
- In 1956, AOTA published the “Guide for Professional Responsibilities for the Occupational Therapist” to maximize educational and clinical contributions of OT to the total treatment program for psychiatric patients.
- In 1958, AOTA assumes responsibilities and adopts educational standard for Certified Occupational Therapy Assistants as well as developed graduate education leading to higher degrees for a master’s level curriculum.

## Methodology

- This research design is a qualitative study using a life history approach. Our participant, Shep, was assigned to us from a list developed by the course instructors through purposive sampling.
- The semi structured interview was guided by an interview schedule prepared by the students and course instructors; questions on the interview schedule were designed to be used with all individuals involved with the larger life history project. Questions regarding the Kawa model were then added as a guide in order to get information that added to the understanding of different aspects of the participants life that shaped them and the practice of OT.
- Data was collected via a video interview and audio recording. It lasted approximately two hours and fifteen minutes.

## Data Analysis and Findings

- The interview was transcribed verbatim and memoed by each researcher. Transcriptions were reviewed by project directors. Websites as well as Shep’s resume was used to verify information obtained from the interviews.
- Data was then coded and three main categories with corresponding themes were created. Researchers developed an audit trail throughout the analysis process to gain trustworthiness.
- The transcription was coded and collapsed into categories and themes.
  - Elements of the transcriptions were used to create codes, themes categories and an overall assertion.

## Categories/Themes

### 1. Personal

1. Shep values his home and community life which has helped him appreciate all the relationships in his life.
2. Shep’s experiences regarding medical and health care professions has shaped the way he values task analysis and occupation-based interventions.
3. Shep uses his diversity awareness to enhance his surroundings and dedication to the OT field.

### 2. Perspectives

1. Shep articulated the important role that family, work colleges and employers had on his ability to adapt and grow.
2. Shep used therapeutic use of self and cultural awareness to connect with his clients.
3. Shep’s experiences working in various facilities has motivated him to be a lifelong learner and to appreciate interprofessional collaboration.

### 3. Practice Influences

1. Shep’s passion for multicultural diversity resulted in changes to program development and policies at the state and national level.
2. Shep’s determination for AOTA’s representative assembly and advocacy for community education resulted in greater opportunities for OT services.
3. Shep’s commitment to the value of OT in healthcare and fought to expand services in all his work environments.

## Discussion

- Shep believes that the occupational therapy job opening set him up with a life full of impacting, advocating, and learning.
- Shep has been practicing OT for 60 years. Apart from those years he devoted his time towards teaching and encouraging students to pursue the occupational therapy profession. As challenging as this was, Shep believes this was one of the most rewarding experiences he has had during his practice years.
- Throughout his career, Shep experienced many changes that have occurred in the field of OT. He expressed that these changes were all for the better but required a lot of time and energy.
- Shep continues to be motivated to learn new things, work in the garden, and appreciate the interprofessional partnerships. He finds that activity analysis as been the most important attribute of all regarding the OT profession.

## Conclusions

### Final Assertion

Shep values personal development and task analysis to enhance a therapeutic relationship with his clients. This has shaped his career path by motivating him to advocate for others in all situations, increasing his commitment to lifelong learning, and dedicating his time to create greater opportunities for the occupational therapy profession.

### Conclusion

The interview with Shep provided a deep understanding of his life throughout his OT career. In addition, Shep provided multiple perspectives and insight regarding occupational therapy and services that he provided. The researchers were able to gain an understanding of the major turning points and challenges that Shep faced regarding the development and upkeep of programs, changes in the OT profession, and legislation. Shep accepts all challenges with a positive mindset and uses these opportunities to enhance his lifelong learning. In addition, researchers gained a better sense of what led Shep to his accomplishments and contributions to the profession of OT. Shep entered the workforce with an OT job opening and was successful in staying true to his values and beliefs despite having to adapt to the expansion of occupational therapy.

You can’t have an activity if you don’t have a life. So activity in the occupational therapy is life itself. – Kuzhilethu “Shep” Kshepakaran , M. Ed, OTR/L, CAPS, FAOTA

## Thank You!

- We would like to thank Shep for his time and participation in our life history study. We enjoyed learning about Shep’s life experiences and the impact he had in the occupational therapy profession.

## References

AOTA. (nd). Important events in occupational therapy in 1970s. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.otcentennial.org/events/1970>.