

The first occupational therapy (OT) school was established 50 years ago, in July 1963, under the direction of foreign OT teachers from Western countries. The Japanese Association of Occupational Therapists (JAOT) was organized in September 1966 with its first 22 Japanese occupational therapist members. Now there are over 60,000 Japanese OTs and 177 OT schools, which may seem to indicate a certain level of development within the country. However, the quality of OT services and a lack of recognition among the Japanese public still represent lingering challenges for the industry.

As you know, a declining birth rate has turned Japan into an ultra-aging society, and the need for OT has increased rapidly to include such patients with development and cognition problems.

The following are the topics of this speech:

1. To describe OT innovations and challenges in Japan to the occupational therapists from abroad, many of whom will encounter the same problems in the near future as birth rates decline and societies age.
2. To offer experienced-based suggestions for hopeful young occupational therapists.
3. To exchange ideas with the occupational therapists and other participants of the WFOT Congress who are concerned with similar problems.

I will address innovations and challenges in Japan from the viewpoint of JAOT. I speak as a JAOT member of the past 50 years, as well as an OT educator, researcher, and administrator.

The contents of this speech are as follows:

1. The history of innovations and challenges of JAOT covers several stages, including each of the past five decades, early history, and the present state of practice.
2. Present state of OT in Japan

In the present community-based approach with comprehensive care and the necessity of teamwork and collaboration, the responsibilities of OT are enumerated here.

3. Messages to future hopeful occupational therapists.

Research in OT will contribute to high technology including robot engineering, brain research, organ transplant, reconstructive medicine, comprehensive medicine, and neurological rehabilitation to advance patient quality of life.