



Advocacy & Government Affairs

OTAC Advocacy Activities Ramp Up for a Very Busy Legislative Season

By Sabrena McCarley, MBA-SL, OTR/L, OTAC Advocacy and Government Affairs Committee Chair



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The California legislative season reconvened its second year of a two-year session on January 3, 2018. OTAC and its lobbyist, Capitol Advocacy, are anticipating that 2018 will be just as busy as 2017 was with several legislative initiatives and priorities, including:

- Modernization of the occupational therapy scope of practice
- Protecting the occupational therapy scope of practice from other healthcare professionals' attempts at scope encroachment
- Credentialing for occupational therapy practitioners working in a school setting
- Occupational therapy agency audits by the California Department of Education
- Changes to Advance Practice requirements
- Continuing to work with and monitor activities of the California Board of Occupational Therapy
- Positively positioning occupational therapy in health care reform
- Advocating for restoration of Medi-Cal funding
- Advocating for adequate reimbursement for occupational therapy services.

Advocacy is critical to the profession and is an important component of the OTAC strategic plan. While not all occupational therapy practitioners are comfortable with or interested in speaking to their legislators, we believe that we are all advocates, even if in small measures, for our profession and the clients that we serve. Every interaction we have with someone is a representation of the profession. We hope that all occupational therapy practitioners wear their OT 'badge' with pride.

Annual OTAC Advocacy Day in Sacramento. Mark your calendars for our annual 'march on the state capitol.' Wednesday, May 9, 2018, 9am to 4pm, Sacramento, CA. OTAC is sponsoring two legislative bills this year so it will be even more exciting to visit legislators' offices and talk about our very own bills: AB 2386 and AB 2221.

Occupational Therapy Grassroots Advocacy Initiative. The Advocacy and Government Affairs Committee vision for 2017-2018 fiscal year is that "Every legislator will have a GO-TO-OT." GO-TO-OT is a grassroots advocacy initiative designed to support the occupational therapy profession in building collaborative and positive relationships with elected officials affording opportunities to educate them about how occupational therapy provides critical services to their California constituents including as well as on OTAC legislative and regulatory positions. A GO-TO-OT is someone who is committed to advocacy and building relationships with their elected officials so that they are the go-to occupational therapy practitioner for any healthcare related legislation or questions. They become a reliable, trusted, and accessible resource for their legislator.

How do you become a GO-TO-OT?

- Get to know who your local legislators are:
 - Assemblymember
 - Senator
 - City council members
 - Mayor
- Sign up for your legislators' mailing lists. They are a great way to:
 - Get to know what your legislator is doing
 - Get to know what bills your legislator is sponsoring
 - Get to know what committees your legislator is involved in
 - Find out about upcoming local events
 - Attend local legislative events:
 - Town hall meetings
 - Fundraisers
 - Community gatherings (picnics, BBQ, etc.)
 - Complete a bit of paperwork, participate in OTAC advocacy conversations, and submit an occasional report.

Building relationships with elected officials takes time – becoming a reliable, trusted resource is not accomplished over night or with one interaction. It is very helpful to have an elevator speech prepared in advance when meeting an elected official. You most likely will only have a few minutes of their time and you want to ensure that your time is meaningful and purposeful. Regularly attending their events helps them to begin to recognize you and recall your expertise and thus become their GO-TO-OT.

The OTAC office and the Advocacy and Government Affairs Committee is building a master list of members that are committed to being a GO-TO-OT. If you already have established relationships with legislators, email OTAC Executive Director Karen Polastri at exccdir@otaconline.org who will send you more information about how the GO-TO-OT program works. We also request that you keep the OTAC office informed of any events or interactions that you have with your legislators. You can access the form here to help make it easy for you to 'report in.'

