Frances Rutherford Lecture

Grace O’Sullivan
MHSc.(OT), NZROT, Doctoral Candidate

Keynote Presentation Wednesday 8 September 9.30am – 10.45am

Time: Occupational therapy: Setting the pace

*I didn’t know what I didn’t know.* I imagine many of us can relate to that thought. Knowledge comes progressively; we learn from experience and act differently as a result of new knowledge and insights. With that notion in mind, the focus of this presentation is the pursuit of knowledge that will make a difference to occupational therapy practice and thus to the health and well being of people and communities. Occupational therapists are challenging existing practices, moving into new settings, and delivering services to populations we previously overlooked. Those changes are occurring because occupational therapy has taken on a new meaning, supported by the principles of occupational justice, equity, and people’s right to have opportunities to engage in meaningful occupations, despite their age or level of ability.

The importance of occupation in people’s lives is increasingly acknowledged at international and governmental levels. The World Health Organisation recognised its role in promoting health in the International Classification of Functioning (2002) as did the New Zealand Governments Health and Disability Sector Standards (2008). As a health profession, we need to foster this shift to maximize the impact we have on the lives of others be they individuals, families, or communities. One way of doing that is to be a proactive agent of change. To illustrate what is within every occupational therapists grasp, this presentation draws on examples from practice, research, and representative roles of the difference one occupational therapist can make by trusting their knowledge base, challenging the status quo in practice, and championing occupational justice.

About the Presenter:
Grace O’Sullivan currently divides her time between her doctoral thesis focusing on the support needs of people who live with dementia in the community, a busy private practice, and her role as editor of the New Zealand Journal of Occupational Therapy.

Graduating from AUT University with a Bachelor of Health Science (Occupational Therapy), and later a Master of Health Science, Grace has made a considerable contribution to knowledge development and dissemination in occupational therapy and occupational science. She has also raised the profile of occupational therapists in professional and governmental forums.

As a result of putting knowledge into practice, she was awarded the Medical Staffing International / NZAOT Occupational Therapy Achievement Award in 2005 for achievement in her field of practice. More recently her work in residential care has been recognised through a Health Care Providers New Zealand, Built and Grown Environment Award in 2007.

Grace will present the prestigious Frances Rutherford Lecture. This award aims to encourage occupational therapists in their professional careers and to acknowledge those who have made a significant contribution in their specialist field of occupational therapy.

Other interests include: Walking the beach early in the morning, working out at the gym, tramping or cycling in the quiet of the countryside, traveling, pottering around in the garden, reading, listening to the sound of silence and country music.