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The OT/OTA student response to COVID-19: A cross-sectional survey of occupational therapy student roles during crisis management
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**Purpose & Methods**
This exploratory cross-sectional survey study sought to understand OT/OTA student use of time and/or volunteering efforts as a result of immediate and unexpected role changes brought on by COVID-19 as students were required to abruptly transition from in-person to virtual learning in every program in the United States (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2020a). The survey was deployed via Qualtrics to online professional networks in spring 2020 and closed after 5 weeks. Quantitative data was analyzed in SPSS and open-response data was categorized and analyzed in Excel. The alpha value was set to 0.05.

**Results**
Participants represented a national sample of students from each type of entry-level OT program (n = 851), and a small number of students were volunteering in response to COVID-19 (6.9%, n = 59). Reasons for volunteering included altruism, justice, personal responsibility, and calls to action from personal networks. The frequency of students in each entry-level program volunteering in response to COVID-19 did not differ significantly (Figure 1). Volunteer activities and populations served are depicted in Figure 2. OTA students selected significantly fewer professional roles of OT professionals during a crisis such as COVID-19 compared to students from all other entry-level programs (Figure 3), while OTA students selected significantly fewer roles of OT professionals after a crisis such as COVID-19 compared to only MSOT and OTD students (Figure 4).

**Discussion**
Most respondents were not volunteering, which may indicate time constraints, lack of PPE, and limited exposure to previous volunteering (Patel et al., 2017). Of the respondents that were volunteering, activities varied and reflected the versatility of the OT lens. Volunteer motivations also evoked similar language to the AOTA Code of Ethics such as justice and altruism (AOTA, 2020b). It is possible that volunteering students have internalized aspects of the Code of Ethics. It is hoped that the results of this study can serve as a call to action for future crisis-related volunteer activities and student exposure to information regarding OT’s role in disaster management.

**Future Directions**
This study demonstrates that students’ socialization to the profession may begin during their degree programs, expanding beyond academic settings and into personal and public volunteering. To promote the scope of OT in future crisis-related activities, educators can:
- Increase student exposure to volunteer and service-learning opportunities
- Include academic literature regarding OT’s role in crisis response in course curriculum
- Foster discussion regarding the applicability of OT’s scope of practice to a wide variety of current events

**References**