

NEWS: Team HOPE 2013 has started with a bang! 33 participants registered on the night of the Information Party.

We are pleased to announce and welcome our sponsors.

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Trinidad and Tobago Occupational Therapy Association (TTOTA) is partnering with Speech Language and Audiology Association of Trinidad and Tobago (SLAATT) to present Team HOPE 2013 (**How Ordinary People do Extraordinary things**)

Occupational Therapists (OT) are health professionals who help people across the lifespan to participate in the tasks they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of everyday activities (occupations). It is our belief that persons have a right to full participation in community life despite mental or physical health status or disability. We believe that the ability to take part in everyday activities of one's choice enhances quality of life. Common occupational therapy interventions include helping children with disabilities to participate fully in school and social situations, helping young adults recovering from injury to regain skills, and providing supports for older adults experiencing physical and cognitive changes.

Occupational therapy services may include comprehensive evaluations of the client's home and other environments (e.g., workplace, school), recommendations for adaptive equipment and training in its use, and guidance and education for family members and caregivers. Occupational therapy practitioners have a holistic perspective, in which the focus is on adapting the environment to fit the person, and the person is an integral part of the therapy team.

Speech Language Pathologists (SLP) provide a wide range of services, including the evaluation of speech, language, fluency and swallowing disorders. Support can be provided on an individual or group basis. Like OT's, SLP's believe in the treatment of the entire child or adult and will work alongside teachers, spouses, relatives and the community to ensure language rich and supportive environments for the children and adults who they see. In Trinidad and Tobago there is a critical need for the services provided by a speech-language

pathologist, for both young and old. With stroke incidents and traumatic brain injuries on the rise, the demand continues to increase. This is because regardless of onset, age or skill level, human beings maintain a desire to communicate and to eat. As a result of this, the demand for SLPs in Trinidad and Tobago is astonishing.

Audiologists provide comprehensive diagnostic and treatment/rehabilitative services for auditory, vestibular balance, and related impairments. These services are provided to individuals across the entire age span from birth through adulthood; to individuals from diverse language, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds; and to individuals who have multiple disabilities. There is a dedication to promote healthy hearing, communication competency, and quality of life for persons of all ages through the prevention, identification, assessment, and rehabilitation of hearing, auditory function, balance, and other related systems. They facilitate prevention through the fitting of hearing protective devices, education programs for industry and the public, hearing screening/conservation programs, and research.

At least ten percent of the population has a disability, therefore there are approximately 150,000 people in Trinidad and Tobago living with a disability that could be remediated, reduced or could have been prevented by these therapies and services. Many of these individuals are unable to access treatment due to a lack of awareness of the disciplines, accessibility to therapists or availability of other resources. Having access to occupational speech therapies as well as audiology services would allow such individuals to maximize their function, lead personally satisfying lives and participate meaningfully in society. Access to full social participation is not only a human right for individuals but also a benefit for communities at large.

Currently there are only 7 OTs, 11 SLPs and 2 audiologists in all of Trinidad & Tobago working in both the private and public sectors. There is a growing and desperate need in Trinidad & Tobago to improve healthcare services for all, and Team HOPE is the education and awareness vehicle for TTOTA and SLAATT this upcoming year. One aim of Team HOPE is to raise awareness as to how expanded occupational and speech therapies as well as audiology services in all settings would contribute to better health and social care. There is simply a lack of awareness of the need for qualified occupational therapists, speech pathologists and audiologists as well as the detrimental effect of the lack of these professions in our country.

The Trinidad and Tobago Occupational Therapy Association founded in 2004, is a registered non-profit organization and is an active member of the Association of Caribbean Occupational Therapists (ACOT). The

Speech Language and Audiology Association of Trinidad and Tobago (SLAATT) was founded in 2008. Both associations are committed to making a positive impact on our national and professional community. TTOTA and SLAATT exist to support member practitioners, represent their interests and those of their service users by influencing national policy, developing the workforce and leading innovation in therapy practice and research.

Through Team HOPE, a unique community-based fundraising and advocacy programme, TTOTA and SLAATT plan to raise public awareness of the situation of occupational and speech therapies as well as audiology services in the country, to create informed ambassadors for people with special needs and to raise funds to support various initiatives and goals of the associations.

Through Team HOPE, each fundraising athlete is paired with a person who has used occupational and/or speech therapy or audiology services, and knows its value to their lives. In this way, both the athletes and service users learn to advocate for themselves. Team HOPE also promotes a healthy lifestyle and full inclusion of ALL people of ALL abilities who are encouraged and supported to take part fully in a sport normally associated only with the elite athletes: triathlon! In this way, Team HOPE is a win-win-win programme where the participants benefit, TTOTA and SLAATT gain support in its mission and ultimately the people with special needs who can benefit from occupational and speech therapies as well as audiology services will have access to these vital services right here in Trinidad and Tobago.

8 things you should know about Occupational Therapy in T&T (Oct 2012)

1. While there are 13 registered occupational therapists for 2012, there are only 7 practicing occupational therapists presently working in a country of 1.5 million people.
2. With 10% of any population assumed to be disabled and able to benefit from occupational therapy, that leaves 150,000 people needing the service of occupational therapy, but not likely to get it.
3. In the 1970's there were 10 occupational therapists in T&T, at least one in each of the public hospitals in Trinidad. But most of them migrated after the oil crash of the 70's. These vacant posts have never been re-filled.
4. Salaries attached to these public sector posts remain at the 1970's rate.
5. There are only TWO occupational therapists working in the public hospitals in Trinidad and Tobago.

6. There are no educational programmes offering Occupational Therapy in the Caribbean. Nationals who want to study must go abroad. TTOTA has once again initiated talks with a tertiary institution to begin a Masters level programme locally. This has been received positively. It is, however, in its beginning phase.
7. TTOTA awarded its first bursary recipient in 2012 through funds raised from Team HOPE 2011.
8. Tobago Regional Health Authority is now down to ONE occupational therapist, after having THREE in 2011.

8 things you should know about Speech Language Pathology and Audiology in T&T (Oct 2012)

1. In the late 70's – early 90's there were only 3 speech therapists practicing in Trinidad and Tobago. During those years, several visiting 'ex pat' therapists helped where possible.
 2. From 2004, returning graduates started setting up private practices on a more regular basis.
 3. There are 11 practicing speech therapists servicing approximately 150,000 persons with disabilities.
 4. SLATT was founded in 2008. With the expansion to include audiologists to the association, SLATT became SLAATT in 2012.
 5. There are only 2 audiologists serving Trinidad presently. There are no audiology services in Tobago.
 6. There are no tertiary educational programmes offering Speech Language Pathology in the Caribbean. Nationals who want to study must go abroad. A Masters level programme is being designed presently as a local institution.
 7. There are NO publicly employed speech-language pathologists in Trinidad.
- There is ONE speech-language pathologist in Tobago.