Interview with Annette Lavezza by Casey Lowry, OTS

Annette Lavezza is a supervisor and manager in acute care at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. She went to occupational therapy school at Towson University and graduated in 1992. She took a job at Johns Hopkins Hospital the same year she graduated and has been working there ever since. When asked to talk about herself, Annette Lavezza stated that she has had the pleasure of working in many environments just within the Johns Hopkins Hospital walls. She has worked in mental health, the dementia clinic, driver rehab, and outpatient neurological rehabilitation before moving to acute care, where she currently works as a manager and supervisor.

Annette Lavezza was then asked how she found out about occupational therapy and told a story about her grandfather. When she was in high school, her grandfather had a stroke and began receiving occupational therapy. He was excited to share what he was learning in therapy, which made her interested in the profession. She went on home visits with the occupational therapist who treated her grandfather and was happy to see that she was getting people back to doing what was important to them.

Annette Lavezza was then asked to talk about someone who influenced her career. She spoke about Kathy Kaufman, the woman who hired her. Kathy Kaufman has been alongside her throughout her entire career and has always been her advocate and her biggest supporter. Once I was out of school and practicing, the person who had the strongest influence on my career is Kathy Kaufman. She hired me and has either been my supervisor or peer throughout my entire career. She has a really wonderful way of identifying people’s strengths, giving them opportunities, and then stepping back and letting them do it. She was my advocate when I went to her and said that I would like to start working in a dementia clinic. When I went to her and said that I think we need a driving program because we have all these patients with dementia who don’t know whether they can drive or not, she was the one who was set on figuring out how to make it happen. Kathy Kaufman is also one of those managers who is really in tune to other people. When I would hit a roadblock or get really anxious about something, she would call me at home and ask me why I was worried. She’s always been my strongest advocate and she’s always the one to remind me that I have all the skills to do what is at hand.

When asked to speak about an experience that stands out in her career, Annette Lavezza chose to speak about an early mobility program that she is a part of which focuses on taking mobility out to the floors of the hospital. As a part of the leadership team on this project, Ms. Lavezza feels as if she can put occupational therapy into a project that might not have previously thought about occupational therapy’s role. If you think about things like readmissions and why patients are coming back to the hospital, let’s not forget about cognitive impairment and medication management. It’s not just whether they can walk home or walk up and down the stairs, it’s whether they remember to do these other things” (A. Lavezza, personal communication, October 8, 2018).

Ms. Lavezza was asked how participation in the Maryland Occupational Therapy Association or the American Occupational Therapy Association has given her opportunities to influence her profession and serve her community and she stated that one of her first presentations at the Maryland Occupational Therapy Association challenged her to think about what she has to share with others. She has also presented at the American Occupational Therapy Association conference a few times, which has given her the chance to share her perspectives in the hopes of influencing how others think about occupational therapy. These presentations also allowed her to learn from others. When asked what her Maryland Occupational Therapy Association presentation was about, Ms. Lavezza recalled that it was on assessments of activities of daily living. Ms. Lavezza was then asked about how to make membership to state and national level associations a priority. She offered the advice that associations should keep membership fees low, be clear about their intents, and be active on social media outlets.

Ms. Lavezza was asked if her career has been as fulfilling as she thought it would be. She stated that she believes it has been. She appreciates the personal growth that has come out of the challenges she faced when treating patients. “Yes. Early on, there are patients that stand out, that make me feel as if I’ve helped a patient. I can think of handfuls of patients that were really challenging for me and at the time, I didn’t appreciate how much that was helping me grow”. Although she currently does not treat patients, she appreciates that she now has influence over the care of more patients through the conversations she has daily.

When asked about what advice she would give to current occupational therapy students, Ms. Lavezza stated that students should not have preconceptions about what they want to do once they start practicing and should be willing and open to any experience that comes their way.