**Interview Summary**

The interview participant is Mr. Kuzhilethu K. Kshepakaran, OTR/L, M.Ed., interviewed by Joshua Keiple, a Towson University Occupational Therapy student, on 5 October 2018. The interview was used to gain valuable insight into both the personal journey of Mr. Kshepakaran as an Occupational Therapist, but also to view the change in the field across his career.

Mr. Kshepakaran attended the Occupational Therapy School at the Nagpur Medical College in India, finding the field of Occupational Therapy completely by accident. His journey to Nagpur took 2 days, and spanned 1,600 miles, all with a very minimal understanding of what OT was, simply because it was not as well-known at the time. Mr. Kshepakaran has been practicing Occupational Therapy (OT) since 1960. He practiced in India, until 1962, when he visited the United States for two years as an exchange worker. He returned to India in 1964, where he worked until 1969, before ultimately coming back to settle in the United States. In 1970, he became a board-certified Occupational Therapist (OTR/L). “When I came to the US, I had to get certified. It was very difficult for me, but I got through it. In the USA, I also got my Master of Education from University of Puget Sound, and pursued a PhD. at the University of Maryland but did not complete. My education did not stop there however, just my time in a formal setting as a student. Continuing education is very important to Occupational Therapists, as things are always changing with new advances and methods, and it is critical to stay current’.

Through his 58 years of practice, Mr. Kshepakaran has worked with many demographics, and has taught OT professionally both in India and in the United States.“I have been a teacher both here and in India, in addition to clinical practice. From 1966-69, I taught part-time in India, teaching both OT and Physical Therapy students. When I came to the USA in 1969, while working as a supervisor of an OT department, I was hired to teach full time here in 1971. My last full-time teaching job was at Chicago State University where I was the OT Program Chair from 1989 to 2001. I moved from Chicago to Owings Mills to be close to my son, and since them have practiced in the area”.

Mr. Kshepakaran states that there are differences as a practicing OTR/L in the aspects of culture, and related physical activities. Such activities include dressing in traditional Indian clothing, cooking while seated, and allowing males to help with the processes of getting dressed. “There are differences, just like there are differences even from state to state. There are a lot of cultural boundaries and practices that don’t translate to American culture. For instance, in India a woman’s way of getting dressed is not the same as a woman getting dressed in the USA; wrapping a sari is a lot more complex than putting on a pair of pants or a blouse. Cooking is also different; many Indian people cook sitting down and may not have the same amenities that are “standard” in the United States. Culturally, even within India, there are differences from place to place. Helping a woman in India with dressing especially by a male therapist, particularly with older folks, goes against a lot of norms, and despite needing the help, they may be hesitant. Above all else though, it is important to make the connection, and get into the person’s life, while keeping their culture in mind”.

When asked about historical changes, Mr. Kshepakaran reports that he has not seen much change in the OT practice, but client receptivity and technological advances improved greatly to improve his practice. Additionally, Mr. Kshepakaran stated that theory is important to serve as a frame of reference when practicing, but using yourself therapeutically, being client-centered, and the consideration that therapeutic methods be both unique and focus on the enablement of higher-level activity through activities of lower-level hold a power in practice. “I have come to believe that participating in activity is the core to effective O.T., and that the most basic physical and emotional functions must be achieved before you can work your way up to the finer levels of operating. As you may know, Mary Reilly focused greatly on activity as a therapeutic means, but I wouldn’t say that I based my practice on her works”.

# Over his career Mr. Kshepakaran has been an active member of both the American Occupational Therapy Association and the Maryland Occupational Therapy Association. He is Fellow of AOTA. Served as a member of the Roster of Accreditation Evaluator of the Accreditation Council of Occupational Therapy Education and served NBCOT as an item writer. At the local level he has been on the State Board of Occupational Therapy Practice, Member, Licensure Board, State of Maryland, 2007-2015 Maryland Alternate Representative, RA, AOTA 2003-2005 Maryland Representative, RA, AOTA 2005-2006. Mr. Kshepakaran is an active member of the AOTA Multicultural Networking Groups and the Asian/Pacific Heritage Occupational Therapy Association.

Mr. Kshepakaran advised the interviewer, being a student that joining at the minimum a student-level organization locally, at your school or nationally, is very important to be a successful OT student. He also says that as a professional, membership to state-level associations and national associations are critical to one’s success as a therapist. The expansion and growth of these organizations and their unique membership bodies has been a welcomed change for Mr. Kshepakaran since he started his journey as an Occupational Therapist nearly 60 years ago. Mr. Kshepakaran went on to convey the importance of seeking minorities groups and societies to represent yourself and your background in such a diverse field.