**Summary of Interview**

I was waiting for Ms. Lila Nappi, the occupational therapist (OT) I was assigned to interview for my Maryland Occupational Therapy Association (MOTA) assignment. I wasn’t exactly sure what to expect, as I’ve never interviewed anyone before this, and I was a little nervous about how it would go. When Ms. Nappi sat down, I quickly learned that professionalism with a sense of casualness was how we both felt comfortable, and I was so pleased to make her acquaintance. The purpose of this interview with Ms. Nappi was to better understand the perspectives and history of an OT, who has a plethora of knowledge regarding theory of occupational therapy and experience.

**Identification and Background**

Lila Nappi, who was interviewed by Benjamin Schuler on September 26, 2018, is an occupational therapist at UMMC who has been practicing in the field for 31 years. Originally hailing from New Jersey, she moved to Maryland in her early 20s and attended college at the Community College at Essex where she received a degree in substance abuse and worked as a substance abuse counselor. She then went back to school at Towson University where she received a degree in psychology and applied to the Occupational Therapy program.

**Summary of Questions and Answers**

Ms. Nappi actually started her OT career on a “whim” (L. Nappi, personal communication, September 26, 2018). With her degree in substance abuse she became a counselor. With limited resources, as well as treatment for substance abuse not being a huge priority at the time, Ms. Nappi wanted to pursue a career that offered more opportunity. Having received occupational therapy as a teenager, she believed that it was a viable and opportunistic choice for a career.

With the opportunity surrounding occupational therapy, she also believes that its services can be applied in many different fields from sports, substance abuse, and disabilities. The person that has influenced her career the most is Karen Eskow, the Chair of the Department of Family Studies and Community Development at Towson University. She was also Ms. Nappi’s occupational therapist when she was in her teens. Actually, Ms. Nappi’s experience with Karen is also what stands out most in her career as an OT. When she was a teen, she was convinced that she could not ask for help. Karen took her to a hillside where they collected a bunch of dandelions. They then would drop the dandelions wherever Karen had said to place them. When they walked down to the bottom of the hill, looking back at the hill revealed the word “HELP,” written in dandelions. Ms. Nappi found that experience to be very valuable and to be what truly impacted her future career as well as her own recovery. She proved to me that I could ask for help when I was utterly convinced that I could not. So that taught me two things. One, that I could ask for help and two, that I didn't know everything that I thought I knew. It was very valuable.

Regarding occupational therapy and substance abuse, Ms. Nappi said: Well interestingly enough, we (occupational therapy) used to provide services within the substance abuse program but it got so convoluted in terms of trying to get preauthorization for insurance purposes that we had to cut it loose. They made it so difficult that it was fully labor intensive and really quite frankly, for the number of days you would get for treatment, the patient wouldn't really benefit from our service. It was just too labor-intensive to continue to take on at the time. Now I know that they're working on making us a recognized provider in outpatient community centers etc., and that would be extremely helpful for us because it would open doors that really currently are not open. There are some OT's that work with substance abuse programs and those are some of the better programs, but they are few and far between. Unfortunately, OT's seem to price themselves out of the market a bit as it relates to those programs. Having said that, there are some OT's that are willing to take people on individually as individual outpatients. We currently are not in the position to do that but there may be some other opportunities for people who have private practice OT that may be interested in seeing if there is something, they can do from an evaluation of a treatment standpoint that may help. Unfortunately, again most of the services are housed within the substance abuse program itself and like I said they are few and far between. There aren’t many that work with OT's specifically.

Another experience she found extremely valuable was her participation in MOTA and the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA). As a young practitioner she presented at conferences and events for both organizations, building a relationship for networking all over the country and even internationally. The information and experience she gained from being a part of these organizations was something she feels she would not have ever gotten if she did not participate in them. With that said, she believes that making incentives, such as making continuing education credits available as an enticement to participate in these groups, would help build a sense of commitment among the newer generations. I would say that Beth Merriman convinced me that some of the work I was doing should be presented as a poster first, and then presented as a scientific technical session. So, that was sort of the beginning of my participation in MOTA and AOTA. I presented at MOTA, I presented at AOTA, I got my game published as a result of presenting it. Yeah, it’s called “Discharge Survival,” it wasn’t like I could retire on it, but it was really cool. Anyways, the point is that my involvement in MOTA as a young practitioner was extremely valuable.  It helped me better understand the profession. It helped me network with people that normally I would not have the opportunity to network with, both in the state and nationally.  Internationally, I presented in Canada.  So that was a really good way to meet other people and really value the career choice I had made.  It reinforced it in every way possible.  Consequently, as I continued in my career, I strongly advise people to participate in a similar manner because it is a really good way to learn a whole new skill set and to give back to the profession that is going to basically give to you for the remainder of your practice. So, I learned a lot of really great information from both AOTA and MOTA.  I felt we were always on the cutting edge of practice as a result.  I met extraordinary people. Multiple extraordinary people.  It just gave me opportunities that I would not normally have during the course of my career. I think that is really important and I hope that more people take advantage of it, because it is a great opportunity for people to learn, and they should take advantage of it. You’ve got leaders and others that participate in MOTA, the bottom line is that the more involved you are, the more in-tune you are with practice and the more influence you have over practice and academia for that matter.  One of the problems with OT is that there is a separation between academia and practice that needs as many bridges as possible, so they can stay connected and so that they can continue to provide the kind of services that people are asking for the kind of services that are going to be paid for in the real world.

When asked if her career has been fulfilling she said, “It’s 31 years later, Ben. I either love this or I’m certifiable” (L. Nappi, personal communication, September 26, 2018). .  I was a reviewer for AOTA over the years and for people who submitted to present at the conference.  I was also a consultant for the AOTA in terms of developing standards of practice for mental health.  So again, being able to do that really changed the course of my career and opened doors that I didn’t know were possible.  I think it is very important to take advantage of opportunities like the AOTA and MOTA because it will open so many doors that you didn’t know existed. Occupational therapy has given her life meaning and purpose, and she wants to give back to it as much as she can in return. Her career has been significantly fulfilling to her.

The last question was how to make involvement in MOTA and AOTA better. Ms. Nappi said “ It's really hard to find the time.  But again, I think if you find the time, the time you spend is well worth it.  What would make it more attractive? That’s a good question.  When I was younger the thing that made it attractive was having a mix of seasoned professionals, new student graduates, sort of come together and want to make the profession better.  I feel like there was this sense of duty to do that.  I don’t know if that’s communicated in the same way, or that people feel that value in the world as we know it today.  But I look at people and know it’s still there.  I look at some of the people on the board and I know it’s still there.  All these people are people who are scholarly, they are smart, they want to learn, they are life-long leaners, they are invested in learning for themselves, and then giving back for the public good.  They are public servants in many ways.  So, I guess the answer to your question is not an easy one. And it’s sort of the trident of triumph.  If you want a sound future moving forward, there has to be those three components.  You have to have the students, the seasoned professionals, and your new grads who have the energy and want to sort of take the baton and take it a mile further down the road.  How do you make it worth their while?  If they feel a sense of belonging and are part of the process, that would help.  I think sometimes they feel like they are part of the process, but they may not necessarily see the end result immediately, and that can be very frustrating.  Being 31 years in, I’ve spent my whole career fighting for mental health benefits.  We are still fighting for mental health benefits, but that won’t stop me from fighting for them.  So, I guess the combination of all three, the academia, the frontline practitioners who are relatively young, and students is the triad you require to build that.  I think that if there are ways to give people credit for their engagement in those activities, that would be useful.  So, any continuing education units, or CEUs, they could get related to that would be useful.  Any ability to be recognized, by state or local community leaders.  Even to participate in activities or community-based activities.  I think on a national level, people need to decide they want to step up and figure out what state-of-the-art occupational therapy is going to look like in the 21st century.  I think people are actively doing it right now.  Technology is changing the face of it so fast Ben, that what we're doing now, five years from now will seem archaic.  Telemedicine is going to be huge.  And we should be seizing the opportunity. Robotics are going to be huge; another opportunity to seize.  But it’s all a fight, you have to go for it.  That’s how a lot of this gets done, how occupational therapy even exists.  People went for it and believed passionately enough in it to say that it is important, and we have to do this.  It is the right thing to do and we’re going to do it.  And they did it.  That’s why we’re here.  We wouldn’t be here without that.  So, if people could harness that and put it in a bottle, it would be lightning in a bottle”.