## Summary of Interview

Dr. Monique Howard, PhD, MBA, OTR/L, was interviewed by Florencia Castelblanco, an occupational therapy (OT) student at Towson University. The purpose of this interview was to provide the Maryland Occupational Therapy Association (MOTA) with the experiential and professional background of its members for the association’s history annals. This interview took place on September 28th, 2018 at Towson University.

The interview began with Dr. Howard being asked to share background information about herself. Dr. Howard briefly introduced herself as a Baltimore-raised Towson University graduate. She described how she was first introduced to the profession of (OT) at Towson University, and how she discovered an affinity for certain areas within the many branches of the field. “When I got to Towson, I was looking for a major, I was undecided, but I always liked health care and always liked art, so as I explored majors I fell into occupational therapy because of the ability to use the arts and health care to help patient populations. I always thought I would work with physical disabilities until I did my internships and realized I liked working [as an occupational therapist] in psychiatry much better.”

Dr. Howard explained that her involvement with MOTA mainly consists of attending the yearly conference for the purpose of continuing education and staying up-to-date on the current practices in the profession, although she is no longer a clinically-practicing therapist. Many years ago she was more active in MOTA and served at its Treasurer.

When asked if she had any experience working with people who have disabilities before entering the field, Dr. Howard explained that she did not have exposure to disability, and that she came to know of the profession, what it entails, and the people it serves, as she was exploring majors at the university. Her interests in art and health care led her to OT, where she could apply both areas of interest to help patient populations. She recalled that her OT class consisted of about 20 students—half of what the OT student body is today. Dr. Howard’s years of experience as an occupational therapist also led her to be part of the university’s OT board for several years.

An experience that stood out in Dr. Howard’s career as a therapist came early on in her career as she led a group session with her clients. Both of Dr. Howard’s parents were public school teachers, and whenever she heard them talk about their teaching experiences, she felt as though she could never teach due to her dislike of public speaking. Dr. Howard shared that while leading this group session on communication skills, she realized that she was not only leading multiple people, but that she was also using pedagogical strategies to teach that group an important set of skills.

Dr. Howard explained that she is no longer a clinically-practicing occupational therapist. She is currently working in uniform for the United States Public Health Services (USPHS), detailed to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). She holds the position of senior health insurance specialist, working in the Centers for Program Integrity (CPI), which focuses on fraud, waste, and abuse in the system. “I oversee a contract and look for overpayment or underpayment of Medicare contractors, making sure they pay correctly”

When asked what led to such a change in her career, she answered that she wanted to see more of the profession from the inside, and how government affects clinical practice, considering the impact of Medicare in health professions. “Back then, payment rates were affecting clinical practice, and I wanted to see, from the inside, what is the policy aspect of health care”.

In terms of how the field has evolved since she was practicing, Dr. Howard mentioned that OT has further developed in terms of application in physical disability, such as driving-evaluations and home-based assessment. Dr. Howard expressed dislike for the field’s less common involvement in mental health, considering that mental health is a historical aspect of the field. She also shared that her preferred area to work in as an occupational therapist was in the psychiatric unit.

When asked if she found her career as an occupational therapist fulfilling, Dr. Howard agreed, but also mentioned that that the industry of health professions can sometimes make one feel restricted. Dr. Howard’s advice for those who are newly entering the field is to be open to opportunity. She expressed great longing to see occupational therapists working in non-traditional fields, especially in government positions where occupational therapists could benefit the profession from within the system. “Be open to opportunities. I would love to see more of us branch out beyond the basic employment structures that we typically pursue. When I go to conferences, I still see therapists who are in clinics working with physical disabilities or nursing homes, but not many working for think tanks. Most people don’t think of government, or what our role could be, and I think that would only help us as a profession. Those settings don’t usually see us, and don’t always know how to utilize us, but there are jobs available if you are willing to work with another job title that might not say Occupational Therapy”.