‘Looking Back’ at Conference 2017
Over two hundred delegates attended the Association of Occupational Therapists Ireland (AOTI)’s national conference on Fri 21st and Sat 22nd April 2017 at the Radisson Blu Hotel & Spa, Limerick.

Mary Barrett began proceedings with look back on occupational therapy, emphasising "You may give up Occupational Therapy but you will never give up being an Occupational Therapist". Friday also saw the preliminary launch of the AOTI Strategy (2017-2022) which aims to create a vibrant and sustainable professional body well into the future.

Friday Morning Presentation highlights included primary care, paediatrics, mental health and Enable Ireland Assistive Technology Workshop.

Annual General Meeting
At the association’s AGM Pauline Burke completed her term as AOTI Chairperson and Sarah Carter was duly elected AOTI Chairperson. We wish them both well.

Following the AGM, Niall Turner and The Editorial Board officially launched The Irish Journal of Occupational Therapy (IJOT) Online. IJOT Volume 45 Issue 1 is now available at http://www.emeraldinsight.com/toc/ijot/45/1

Friday Afternoon highlights included LGBT Guidelines, Ann Beckett Award Winners, Occupational Identify, Education and Research as well as a workshop for Intellectual Disability services.
Day one ended with 2017’s new concept the *Wellness Workshops*. This went down very well with delegates learning new methods for incorporating self-care and mindfulness in their personal and professional daily activities.

**Conference Gala Dinner**

The night kicked off with Occupational Therapy Cocktails ‘*Mojo-ito*’ and ‘*COPM-politan*’. Following dinner, Mariead Connaughton received the Ann Beckett 2016 award for her project: Discover/Recover Theatre Project and Mental Health Schools Workshops, Wexford, along with her colleagues Paula Lowney and Niall O’Muiri. Mary Barrett was again centre stage, this time to receive an honorary life membership for the association. The highlight of the evening was guest of honour *Sinead Kane* who shared her life experiences and how "when you're in a difficult situation, you need to adapt".

**Saturday**

Day two of conference kicked off with further Wellness Workshops to prepare for a day of learning. Many thanks to our Wellness Workshop facilitators.

**Day two showcases**

Day two provided an opportunity for clinicians to highlight clinical practices undertaken by occupational therapists in Ireland from service development, peer supervision to emerging therapy interventions.

**Closing Keynote Speaker**

Conference ended with a look to the future for occupational therapists and occupational therapy in Ireland. *Adam Harris* from ASIAM, closed conference with an inspiring speech "We have mainstreamed people but we haven’t mainstreamed autism". Adam provided details of his personal story and how he uses his experience to provide support and education in creating a more positive world for people with autism.
With Great Thanks!!

From the AOTI Conference Committee Thank you to all involved in the planning and preparation for AOTI Conference 2017.

‘Moving Forward’ to 2018

1. IJOT Online - Publish your work – Go that ‘extra mile’

Benefits of Publishing

- Advance your practice/area of interest on a national and now international level
- Stimulate critical debate in your area
- Be a clinical lead in your field of expertise
- Gain dissemination and possible citation on a worldwide level
- & Gain recognition for all that hard work!!!

What IJOT Online brings to you

- A streamlined submission system with regular updates on your article
- Access to writing supports/guides to help you go that ‘extra mile’
- The highly regarded double blind peer review process continues
- A 6-month turnaround is possible once submissions are at suitable level
- Detailed feedback from peer reviews given
- With open and free online access, IJOT gives you global readership of your published work

What Next?

- Check out our latest IJOT journal (Vol 45 Issue 1) http://www.emeraldinsight.com/toc/ijot/45/1
- Create a scholar one account to start your submission https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ijot
- Interested in becoming an IJOT Peer Reviewer - All expressions of interest are welcome via email to ijot@aoti.ie

2. Planning Ahead - Looking at Conference 2018

Feedback from this year conference has been great

‘The quality of keynote speakers was outstanding this year – a high bar has been set for the next AOTI conference’

‘Accessible and easy to find location’

‘Rooms for presentation were well laid out and easy to find’

‘The addition of the wellness workshops is welcomed and a great finish to Friday and start to Saturday. Self-care was definitely highlighted so well done’
However, there has also been plenty of reflection and lot of work to be done to improve the conference experience for all members:

‘I would like more posters and more alerting to the posters when the conference is being opened. In past years there was a prize for the best poster and the best abstract. I feel that this year the posters were not highlighted.’

‘Showcasing the work that special interest groups do nationally – perhaps all the special interest groups present? Maybe there are CPD talks that now happen in special interest groups and no longer happen at conference but I would like a lot more national representation of OT’

‘Could there be other exhibitors for other fields of practice? Speaking to mental health colleagues there or those who don’t work with equipment I think they felt these weren’t relevant to them’

The primary benefits reported included the quality of the key note speakers, improved program layout and timing. There was a great sense of innovation with the variety of roles an Occupational Therapists can drive and/or be apart off. The practical clinical workshops and the wellness workshops were welcomed. As too was the importance of meeting/networking with colleagues as well as the Gala Dinner celebrations!

Feedback was also given in relation to the overall cost of the conference. The Conference committee are acutely aware of this and continue to strive to reduce costs. Conference 2017 achieved a small profit for the association. Conference requires a significant amount of planning and organising with costs including: venue, audio visual equipment, keynote speaker expenses, graphic designs & marketing, sponsorship and exhibition as well as administration and catering including the gala dinner. It is hoped that going forward we can work to reduce planning costs that will ultimately have an impact on the cost for delegates. A survey for conference planning will be sent to all members and we hope that you will provide your thoughts and feedback for conference. At the end of the day a professional body would be nothing without its membership and conference should be a reflection of the membership.

There were multiple suggestions for 2018; more skill based workshops, more specific clinical and evidence based presentations on everyday OT practice skills; this would allow delegates to walk away with new learning and direct skill base that can be incorporated into their own practice. Streamlining students and research presentation into their own strand as well as open forums for questions and answers was also suggested. More posters and possible poster prize competition was suggested. A greater focus on the highlighting the work of the special interest groups was also suggested.

This is just a snapshot of the feedback received but the message is very clear – therapists want clinical information, want practical knowledge, and evidence base as to be able to take this away with them and apply to their practice. Whilst the focus of the conference continues to be highlight the spread and wide-ranging aspects of our profession the need for applied clinical presentations was clearly emphasised. Thus, the conference committee urges you and your colleagues to look at your practice, ask yourself what are you doing well, what initiatives, big or small, would be worth spreading and sharing, what new practises and/or expansion on current projects are you involved in and most importantly what could you and your team present at Conference 2018!!

The Conference is a great opportunity to show case your work and achievements from clinical practice on a national level. The conference is what we all bring to it so let’s get going for 2018!