

Pooja A. Patel, DrOT, OTR/L, CDP, CFPS, CGCP

papatel308@gmail.com | Nomination: President-Elect

Position Statement:

As a candidate for the position of President-Elect for the Illinois Occupational Therapy Association, I am dedicated to addressing the growing gap between younger and senior therapists in our profession. It is crucial to have the voices of younger practitioners represented at local and national tables to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the current state of our profession while respecting its history. I firmly believe that younger practitioners bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and a deep understanding of the evolving needs of our profession. By electing younger voices to leadership positions, we can bridge the gap and foster collaboration between different generations of occupational therapists. Through my experience as a National President for the National Occupational Therapy Honor Society, I have witnessed firsthand the disconnection between current-day practice and the decision-making processes of state and national organizations. It is essential to have leaders who are familiar with both the historical context and the realities of today's practice to make sustainable changes. Embracing younger voices in leadership will invigorate the occupational therapy community, promoting diversity of thought and the advancement of evidence-based practices. By actively involving young practitioners in decision-making, we can ensure the profession remains responsive to the evolving needs of our clients and continues to thrive. In this critical moment, we must recognize the urgency of including younger practitioners in leadership positions within the Illinois Occupational Therapy Association. By electing me as President-Elect, you are choosing to bridge the gap between generations, promote inclusivity, and empower the voices of the future. Together, we can shape a profession that is united, vibrant, and adaptable to the changing landscape of healthcare. I would be honored to serve ILOTA in this capacity.

Education & Professional Experience:

I completed my Doctor of Occupational Therapy degree from the now former University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, PA in 2017. I am a continuous learner, with specialty certifications in dementia, fall prevention, and geriatric care. As an acute care therapist for six years, I specialized in general medicine and observation units, primarily inclusive of patients with psychosocial needs. In addition to being a full-time clinician, I successfully led inter- and intra-departmental process and quality improvement projects, including a system-wide process change across ten hospitals. I have taught Mental Health & Psychosocial Practice in OT as an adjunct assistant professor for three years. Now nearly a year ago, I left full-time in acute care to start my own private practice, catering to clients and families navigating dementia, falls, and senior care planning.

Areas of Practice: acute care, primary care/OP Med B, cognition, dementia, falls, senior care, family consulting

Professional Activities & Honors:

I served as the National President of Pi Theta Epsilon (PTE), the national OT honor society, from Nov. 2017 - April 2022. During my tenure, we proudly grew chapter membership from 95 to 127 chapters nationwide, with over 20,000 active members. In my role, I formally created a strategic plan that continues to be reviewed and updated annually by the new President and Executive Committee. I facilitated monthly meetings with our Executive Committee, as well as attending quarterly AOTF Board meetings, during which I presented our activities, accomplishments, downfalls, strategic plan, and long-term goals, as well as new initiatives. Additionally, I oversaw the development and execution of our 4-5 annual events at AOTA Conference each year. My role also included liaising with the PTE Coordinator at AOTF as an affiliate organization. As President, my responsibilities included information dissemination, review and approval of various documents created by other team members, and collaboration with other board members, committees, and members. I pride myself in having served this organization to members' needs first, and governing bodies second, because without members, we wouldn't need governance. In my legacy, the President after me established a new scholarship award in my name.

I also served as a mentor for ILOTA's Leadership Development Program during its inaugural year.

Professional Memberships:

AOTA: continuous member since 2014; annual conference attendee and presenter

ILOTA: continuous member since 2017