

Questions and Answers

Among the many inspiring athletes who captivated the world during the 2012 Summer Olympics and Paralympics in London were several occupational therapists, including **Kerri Morgan, MSOT, OTR/L, ATP**, who won two bronze medals at the 2012 Paralympics, in the 100m and 200m wheelchair race. Morgan talked with AOTA Web editor Stephanie Yamkovenko about how she juggles it all (and won two bronze medals while doing so).

Yamkovenko: How did you prepare for the Paralympics, and how often were you training?

Morgan: I train all year around. I have a great coach that cycles my training and plans accordingly depending on upcoming competitions. In the off season I do some cross training with other sports, such as wheelchair rugby and strength training. During track season, I work more on my speed and acceleration. I typically am training 6 days a week (1 to 2 times per day). My coach schedules recovery times for my body to rest and recover.

Yamkovenko: How do you juggle being an OT instructor at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, a PhD student, and a Paralympian?

Morgan: In a perfect world, I probably would not be doing all three of these activities at the same time. However, you have to work with the circumstances that you are given. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to return to school for my PhD several years ago and at the same time still be able to teach my assistive technology class. Training, teaching, and studying make for a very full schedule that does not allow much time for other activities—it forces me to be focused and organized. When I am training, I know that is the only time I have that day to be training, so I need to be focused and make it as productive as possible. The same goes for work and school activities.

Yamkovenko: How does being a medaled Paralympian influence your occupational therapy teaching, practice, and research?



Morgan: Being a competitive athlete has influenced my teaching, practice, and research perspectives more than I thought it would. I find that when teaching, having examples and personal perspective helps in conveying messages. I think I am an example that people with disabilities can compete at the highest level, that they can accomplish anything they put their minds to. I am approached by other therapists and by people with disabilities in the community about my accomplishments and am asked to speak one on one with people about the possibilities and how to overcome barriers. Training and competing have made me even more aware of the benefits of exercise and recreation for everyone, but especially for people with disabilities. One of my interests from this is making opportunities for people with disabilities to improve overall health through practice and supporting it through research.

Yamkovenko: I've read that several Paralympians got into their sports at the suggestion of their occupational therapist. Why do you think occupational therapy plays a role in getting people interested in the Paralympics?

Morgan: Occupational therapists have a very unique opportunity in assessing and really getting to know their clients and their occupations. I think sport, whether recreational or competitive, is an extremely important occupation for those who are interested and is a great avenue to motivate people. OTs have unique access to adaptive sports and therefore are able to show their clients that sports are still an option for them.

Yamkovenko: Is there a role for occupational therapy practitioners in assisting in future Paralympics?

Morgan: I see many roles for OT—some more formal than others. Educate clients, client's family members, students, and colleagues about the opportunities for people with disabilities in the Paralympics. Just because you have a disability does not mean that you cannot participate competitively at the very top levels. Additionally, the skills occupational therapists have would be very good for coaching or helping to assess people with disabilities for the right adaptive equipment (in fact, one of the Paralympic track and field coaches is an occupational therapist). Another role is as a classifier—all athletes are assessed by a classification panel prior to competing to determine which classification they should be competing in to make the playing field as equal as possible. The classification panel is composed of occupational therapists, physical therapists, and physicians.