Welcome

Welcome to the fourth volume of the International Journal of Orientation and Mobility. In view of the upcoming International Mobility Conference 14, New Zealand in February 2012, may I take the liberty to reflect upon the history of our profession and its increasingly lengthy history of international gatherings? The profession of Orientation and Mobility (O&M) originated in the USA at the Valley Forge Army Hospital during World War II. Later, developments moved to what has become the Edward Hines Jr. Veteran Administration Medical Center in Illinois. The pioneers who developed the long cane teaching techniques now used all over the world, who trained at the Hines Rehabilitation Center were among our profession’s first mentors as well as ambassadors of the new discipline of O&M that was taught at Boston College in Massachusetts and at Western Michigan University. In addition these pioneers introduced O&M to other countries. Currently O&M is an advanced and respected profession among the major para-medical rehabilitation disciplines in some countries. It is found within the field of education in others and is still regarded as a technical vocation in a few other places. The evolvement of the title of the discipline which provides service in developing of the other senses and teaching route travel using the long cane training much depends on geography.

What’s in a name?

Peripatologie was the title first given to O&M instruction at the Boston College professional preparation programs. Rehabitologist is a commonly used title in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states. ‘Thiflo Pedagogue’ is a common used title for O&M instruction in Greece, Russia, and other parts of Europe. The evolution of ‘political correct’ terms in western nations, has more recently generated the title ‘O&M’ Specialist. The fact that a majority of people with vision impairment who receive O&M instructions are individuals with low vision has caused the latter label to evolve into ‘Vision Therapist’. The following are more examples that demonstrate the range of titles (in alphabetic order), that refer to those who are trainers in the art and science of Orientation and Mobility: home teacher; independent movement instructor; instructor in electronic travel aids; instructor in low vision aids; instructor of the blind; long cane teacher; mobility assistant; mobility instructor; O&M teacher; orientation therapist; orientor; peripatologist; rehabitologist; tiflo instructor; tiflo pedagogue; travel instructor; travel specialist; vision rehabilitation therapist; vision specialist.

Our profession’s need for Continuing Education and updates are generally met at the IMCs, the International Mobility Conferences. IMCs first started at Frankfurt, Germany in 1979, initially as an interest group of German O&M specialists led by Dennis Cory. IMCs rapidly evolved into major international professional gatherings of O&M specialists who meet every two and a half years. IMCs have been held at the following locations: France (1981), Austria (1983), Israel (1986), the Netherlands (1988), Spain (1991), Australia (1994), Norway (1996), USA (1998), England (2000), South Africa (2003), and Hong Kong.
(2006). To celebrate the 30th anniversary of IMC the (2009) meeting took place in Germany where the concept originated. Our profession’s next meeting (2012) is scheduled to take place in Palmerston North, New Zealand and Canada is planned to follow that IMC in 2015.

The IMC is essentially an event held by an independent group of practitioners in mobility for children with vision impairment, adults, and elderly. Participants are generally O&M specialists and those from related disciplines. An IMC’s aim is to further O&M instructor level of expertise through an international exchange of ideas and information. An IMC is dedicated to co-operation with all organisations of and for people who are blind. The IMC promotes the quality of O&M services and advocates for establishing services where these do not yet exist. Since IMC8 in Norway, the Suterko-Cory award ceremony to commemorate a significant contribution in O&M professional training on an international level has become an integral event at IMCs.

**Our profession’s major award**

The people after whom the award is named:

**Stanley Suterko** who passed away in 2008, started his professional career as a corrective therapist in physical medicine and rehabilitation at the Veteran Administration (V.A.) Hospital at Hines, Illinois. With the establishment of the Hines Central Blind Rehabilitation Center in 1948 he was among the first five from the centre to be prepared as ‘orientors’ for veterans who were blind. He helped refine the orientation procedures and cane techniques that had been previously developed at Valley Forge Army Hospital. In 1960 the first academic course was established at Boston College as its Peripatology Program. A year later the Western Michigan University program began. As Assistant Director, Suterko played a key role in the establishment of the O&M curriculum, adapting the Hines program to a university course structure. Suterko’s international work included conducting a training program in 1966 that introduced the long cane to England. During short visits he conducted workshops in many countries including Australia, Poland, Denmark, Germany, France, and New Zealand. He has been called by the Australian Royal Guide Dog for the Blind Association, the “St. Peter of Mobility”.

**Dennis Cory**, American born, started his career in the field of blindness as dormitory counsellor and English teacher at the German Institute for the Blind in Marburg, Germany. His involvement with children with vision impairment inspired him to return to the USA to get a Master degree in O&M at Western Michigan. Soon after, he returned to Germany where he and his wife Pamela, with Bea and Joachim Fischer, founded the Mobility Center in Marburg. In 1979 he and his wife courageously founded the IRIS Center in Hamburg. This centre became one of the most noteworthy training centres in Europe where professionals from the continent gained their O&M and ADL education. Besides training large number of ‘O&Mers’ in Germany, Cory held training courses and served as a guest teacher for O&M for organisations offering rehabilitation services in Switzerland, Austria,
China, Denmark, France, Spain, and Israel. It was his vision and leadership in the field while still in Marburg that motivated forming the IMCs as a platform for professional exchange. Until very recently Cory assumed responsibility as IMC President and stepped down at IMC’s 30th anniversary. Nowadays aside of international training, he is active mostly in research and development of O&M technologies. Cory is said to be a great believer that O&M ‘can be best discussed over a glass of beer at a brewery.’

Finally, a reminder: in February 2012 O&M specialists from around the world will gather for the 14th time for the International Orientation and Mobility Conference (IMC14). This time the assembly will take place in the southern hemisphere of our planet, more specifically at Massey University, Palmerston North in New Zealand. Prof. Steve La Grow is the chairperson of the local organising committee. He and his team are working hard to assure a successful conference.

Methods, skills, techniques, and technologies related to training people with vision impairment to travel independently will be the focus of more than 130 lectures, panels, and poster sessions. As well as the educational aspects the conference is an opportunity for personal exchange and for making links with professionals from a wide range of cultures, economic, and professional preparation backgrounds.

I sincerely hope that the reflections on milestones in the history of O&M and IMC will motivate IJOM readers to join the excitement at IMC14.

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