

Retro Riley for April 2023_Occupational Therapy Month

Anita Slominski

Anita Slominski, OTR, FAOTA, (1922-2010) was a creative, inspiring, and visionary force to be reckoned with as the Clinical Coordinator of Riley Hospital's Cerebral Palsy Clinic from 1948 to 1986. When Winifred Conrick Kahmann, Director of the Occupational Therapy Department at Riley Hospital, returned in 1945 from WWII service from a 2-year stint in Washington, D.C. where her responsibilities involved recruitment, education, and assignment of 900 OTs nationwide to provide therapy for wounded soldiers, she wasted no time. Kahmann initially hired Slominski in 1946 as a staff therapist for the Cerebral Palsy Clinic, which began in 1937. Two years later, in 1948, Kahmann appointed Slominski as Clinical Coordinator of the Clinic and for the next 38 years, Slominski, as Clinical Coordinator, built a lasting foundation for the Clinic's enduring legacy for innovation in patient care and rehabilitation that continues today and helped shape careers of clinicians and students through her example, knowledge of cerebral palsy, and teaching. After 1952, the Cerebral Palsy Clinic was in the Rotary Building along with the multiple sclerosis and speech and audiology clinics.

Slominski inspired students, staff, and patients. Celestine Hamant, MS, OTR, FAOTA was selected by Slominski as the Clinic's first teen volunteer, an initiative that evolved into the Teen Tonic program. "Teen Tonic" gave teen age girls interested in pursuing careers in medicine, nursing, and therapy an opportunity to teach children in the clinic how to play and work for themselves. Hamant earned her B.A. in 1962 and that same year a post-B.A. occupational therapy certificate from Washington University and returned to the clinic in 1964 to become a staff therapist and the director of the Teen Tonic program for the next five years. In 1969, she was appointed Supervisor of Riley Hospital's Occupational Therapy Department and that same year, initiated the use of Riley wagons to assist in transport of patients and equipment, which led eventually to the widespread use of Riley Red Wagons throughout the hospital, a practice that continues today. Hamant's career included service from 1984-2004 as Director, Occupational Therapy Program and Clinics, Division of Allied Health, School of Medicine, Indiana University.

Karen Bruner Stroup, who directed Riley Hospital's Automotive Safety for Children program from 1983-1993, met Slominski only once -- at Slominski's 1986 retirement party -- and credits Slominski as an inspiring example she long remembered in the decades that followed as the Automotive Safety for Children Program went on to develop innovative products and spearhead national and international research and education on safe transportation of children with special needs.

In 1978, 22-year-old Susie Kuper, who battled cerebral palsy most of her life and was a member of the "Baby Group" of the Cerebral Palsy Clinic at Riley Hospital, was now a junior at Ball State University with dreams of a career in law. Kuper said in an interview, "Whether it's fun or study, I just keep trying. Life is a prize for everyone." Kuper credited Slominski for helping her to establish her courageous attitude.

Slominski's knowledge of cerebral palsy and of the needs of her patient was unmatched. Therapists who knew Slominski remember how she was always intent on finding ways to help a child and fondly recall how she saved everything as she never knew how an item might be used or modified to create a toy or tool to help a child with cerebral palsy develop strength and mobility. Other colleagues who developed an innovative occupational therapy outreach program to provide patients with adapted positioning

equipment acknowledged her “vision and wisdom to focus on the patients’ needs in a changing world of medicine.” Slominski was an Indiana University graduate with a degree in Art and earned her OTR certification from New York City’s Columbia University. Her art background gave her knowledge of forms and materials to devise, adapt, or improve equipment for patients. One outstanding innovation was a mouth plate that fit over the teeth and had many applications. Her idea was that a patient not able to use his arms could learn to do several things if he could hold tools in his mouth without hurting his teeth.

Slominski worked with a dentist to create an individually fitted mouth plate made of dental acrylic. Each mouth plate had to be made to fit the mouth of a specific patient and adjusted or remade during dental growth or change. Slominski recalled some of the inspiring results: “Those who can’t talk can communicate by typing. A stick can be held in the plate and used to hit the typewriter keys.” “A child who had no concept of the sucking or swallowing action could be helped by placing a straw with one end in a closed box and the other in the mouth plate, forcing him to breathe through his nose.” Slominski’s innovation caught on. In a 1962 interview, she remembered that “We’ve sent our material to 28 or 30 states and 15 foreign countries.”

Only three Hoosiers (Winifred Conrick Kahmann (1952), Celestine Hamant (1984), and Anita Slominski (1986), all who served Riley Hospital for Children) are recognized as recipients of the American Occupational Therapy Association’s Award of Merit, the Association’s highest award. Indiana University awarded the Spirit of Philanthropy Award to Slominski in 2005.

References:

American Occupational Therapy Association, OT Award of Merit:

<https://www.aota.org/community/awards/ot-award-of-merit>

Anita Slominski: AOTA Award of Merit Recipient (1986). Other recipients: Celestine Hamant, 1984 and Winifred Conrick Kahmann, 1952

Anita Slominski, Indiana University Honors and Awards:

<https://honorsandawards.iu.edu/awards/honoree/7782.html>

Anita Slominski Obituary (May 4, 2010): <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/indystar/name/h-slominski-obituary?pid=144951862>

Helen Anita Slominski, Find a Grave: <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/52039689/helen-anita-slominski>

Jerry A. Johnson and David A. Ethridge (editors), *Developmental Disabilities: A Handbook for Occupational Therapists*, Routledge, New York, 2012, p. 227:

https://books.google.com/books?id=Qo7Thlp3SBUC&pg=PA227&lpg=PA227&dq=anita+slominski&source=bl&ots=R6iyZndS1Q&sig=ACfU3U3WfkWPd7EL7WbKEUz9X_arDxyoRw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewibzL-Bn_j9AhXxj4kEHQkGBJ8Q6AF6BAgnEAM#v=onepage&q=anita%20slominski&f=false

“Cerebral Palsy Victim has Dream,” *Indianapolis Star*, August 10, 1978, p. 18, accessed through Indianapolis Public Library.

Thomas F. Fisher and Elaine E. Fess, *History of Professional Occupational Therapy Education at Indiana University, 1924-2022*, pp. 8-10: <https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/handle/1805/30554>

"Therapist uses training in art to aid cerebral palsy victims," *Indianapolis Star*, May 20, 1962, p. 80 (Section 6, p. 2), accessed through Indianapolis Public Library.

"Cerebral Palsy Honors W. Book," *Indianapolis Star*, May 18, 1964, p. 17, accessed through Indianapolis Public Library. (Note: references Celeste Hamant as first teen volunteer at the Cerebral Palsy Clinic and as the new director of the Teen Tonic Program).

"Volunteer Teen-Age Girls aid Victims of Cerebral Palsy," *Indianapolis Star*, August 21, 1958, p. 7, accessed through Indianapolis Public Library. (note: interview with Celestine Hamant, teen volunteer).

"Growing into a Career," *Indianapolis Star*, May 12, 1963, (*Indianapolis Star Magazine*), pp. 18-19. (Note: Celeste Hamant spoke in this article about her hope to one day return to Indianapolis to be on staff at the Cerebral Palsy Clinic).

"Helpless Kiddies find Hope at Clinic," *Indianapolis Star*, October 9, 1955, p. 53 (Section 4, p. 1), accessed through Indianapolis Public Library.

"Utterly Helpless Children being taught to care for themselves at Riley Hospital's Clinic for little cerebral palsy patients," *Indianapolis Star*, August 15, 1937, p. 3, accessed through Indianapolis Public Library.

Photos:



Title: Anita Slominski

Item ID: UA24-008501

Link: <https://indianamemory.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/IUPUIphotos/id/7846/rec/1>



Title: Cerebral Palsy Clinic Open House, 1957

Item ID: UA24-001823

Link: <https://indianamemory.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/IUPUIphotos/id/4144/rec/4>

On back of photo: Open house on the 20th anniversary of the Cerebral Palsy clinic 1957. L to R: Miss Anita Slominski, on leave of absence Columbia University, in preparation to setting up Cerebral Palsy Clinic; Frank M. Hall, M.D. medical director of the Crippled Children's Section of Indiana; Mrs. Winifred Kahmann, liaison director of Cerebral Palsy Clinic at the IU Medical Center (CP Clinic at that time).