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The Many Faces of Betty Cox

## The Many Faces of Betty Cox



By Claudia Stahl

You have to admire the concept: earn CEUs and frequent flier miles all at once. How? A tour de OT, Betty Cox style. For more than 13 years, Cox, a COTA has been combining cultural and professional education with her overseas seminars. And as technology continues to make the world smaller, Cox's programs are growing in popularity.

"Thirty-five percent of the people who have taken our foreign programs return to take more," said Cox, "so we must be doing something right."

Betty Cox Associates Inc., based in Baltimore, MD, sponsors educational workshops of interest to OTs, PTs, SLPs, educators and individuals in related professions. Renowned speakers present on a wide array of topics, from electrical stimulation to ergonomics.

But the overseas programs allow for an entirely different type of learning. "The wonderful thing about the foreign programs is we have experts from the (host) countries speak to us, so we are able to learn their perspectives on OT," Cox said. "Practice abroad is somewhat different than it is here in the U.S. Some countries may not be as scientifically developed in terms of occupational therapy, but all OTs have the same sense of humanity."

Cox, an experienced traveler, held her first overseas course at Cambridge University in 1983. The response was so great she decided to host workshops in other foreign locations.

Her company has since offered workshops at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, in Scandinavia, and on cruise ships in the Caribbean. This fall, Betty Cox Associates is sponsoring a first-ever educational cruise to the Greek Isles. And next March, Betty Cox Associates will be looking for footprints of OT in the sands of ancient Egypt.

What do therapists enjoy most about the overseas workshops? "They say they get invaluable experience because they have time away from their ordinary activity. They are learning about OT, but a bit differently; they have the time to relax and reflect a little in the process."

The therapists who participate in Betty Cox's travel tours often form networks with therapists abroad and in the U.S. Some have taken sabbaticals or participated in research overseas as the result of friendships formed in workshops.

Betty Cox's role as a business owner has not overshadowed her career as a therapist. She works at Springfield Hospital Center in Sykesville, MD, two days a week, where she serves as co-director of the facility's senior center.

Direct patient care, she said, "keeps me current. I understand the changes in the health care system far better by being in it than by reading about it."

Cox's curriculum vitae is seven pages long. Half her education was devoted to the arts. She attended the Peabody School of music, the Peabody Preparatory school for dance and the School of American Ballet in New York. She took drama at New York University and Johns Hopkins University. She was even a Rockette at Radio City Music Hall.

Cox became acquainted with occupational therapy when she began working as the program and public relations director at Stella Maris Hospice in Towson, MD, in 1968. As part of her job, Cox and volunteers created activities for the residents there, from ceramics, to drama, to kite-flying. "But a state law then

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Her involvement in the White House Conference on Aging set Cox's television career in motion. It was there that she was approached about producing a program on aging. Cox produced two weekly half-hour television programs--*Better with Age* and *Today's Women*--from 1972-1978 for WBAL-TV NBC and became the host of both shows.

Cox said *Better with Age*, won awards and was very popular with older viewers, but lacked funding. "But Hugh Downs was funded--he took over," said Cox.

Cox took every available opportunity to mention occupational therapy in her television programs. She also produced 44 videos on different OT subjects (see this week's cover story) and authored articles, promotional material and books.

During those years as a television host and producer, Cox worked part-time as director of public affairs for the AOTA. After six years of doing both OT and TV, Cox decided to become a full-time employee of the AOTA. She served as director of communications until 1983, when she launched Betty Cox Associates.

Cox said she has always been proud of her background as a COTA. She advises therapists who want exciting, growth-oriented careers to get involved in their state associations, as well as the AOTA.

"The opportunities for COTAs are enormous in all kinds of things. I have led a very interesting life as a COTA, and have had a lot of opportunities that came from being available and involved."

At age 57, Cox intends to continue her professional education and travel pursuits, and concentrate on being a worthy grandmother to "the greatest grandson in the world." Being active, she believes, is the duty of every therapist.

"There is nothing more practical than OT," she said. " And there will be a place for occupational therapy in the changes ahead in health care. But we have to keep learning and remain up-to-date about what is happening in our profession. If we don't, we will be left behind." \*

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