

## PRIVATE PRACTICE INSIGHTS



TOPIC EDITOR: FLORA TO-MILES

## Just...start! (But first, do your research and make a plan)

Chelsea Gordon, CAOT Intern

Amit Kumar and Lakshmi Gupta are not afraid to try something new, especially if they can do it together. They are occupational therapists, award-winning entrepreneurs, the owners of Life Skills Therapy (a growing community occupational therapy business) and Neurofunction Rehab (a new neurorehabilitation clinic) in Surrey, British Columbia, and the proud parents of two. However, where they began is very different from where you can find them today. Some staff at the National Office of the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) had the pleasure of meeting them through their involvement as active members of the association last year and felt that they had a great story to share. Months later, as the new CAOT intern with a penchant for storytelling, I jumped at the opportunity to speak with Amit and Lakshmi about their ongoing journey in occupational therapy, including the risks they have taken and the successes they have enjoyed.

I interviewed Amit and Lakshmi over the phone. I learned that they are both originally from India and that they have studied and practiced in a number of countries around the world including India, Kuwait, England and Ireland. I also learned that, together, they bring almost 30 years of a wide variety of clinical experience to their practice, including acute care, neurological rehabilitation, community and inpatient rehabilitation, geriatrics and hand therapy. They went on to tell me that, after making the decision to move to Canada in 2011 and reading stories about the long months of snow, sleet and sub-zero temperatures in other provinces, they decided British Columbia was the right province for them. They made the move, but soon after, the pair found themselves raising a young family and unable to find work. Not willing to give up without having tried absolutely everything to make their transition to Canada as occupational therapists, the pair made the decision to take a chance and create their own business.

### Working with your strengths

As we began to talk more about their transition to Canada and to becoming business owners, it became apparent that Amit and Lakshmi are a balanced and dynamic team. They talked openly about building on one another's strengths, learning from one another and always pushing the other to grow. Lakshmi described Amit as a true leader. She told me that he always has a clear vision for short- and long-term goals, that he can energize and

motivate those around him, and that he is solutions-focused. Amit attributed much of the duo's success to Lakshmi's methodical and detail-oriented approach to turning their goals into actions. It was with mutual trust and support that Amit and Lakshmi were able to take on the risks of moving to Canada and starting a private occupational therapy practice. By calling on their individual and combined strengths, they have found success and continue to grow as a couple, as occupational therapists and as entrepreneurs.

### A natural transfer of skills: Clinicians to business owners

Amit and Lakshmi felt that being occupational therapists equipped them both with the necessary skills and tools to launch and expand their businesses. With no formal training in business, they approached starting Life Skills Therapy the same way they would approach occupational therapy interventions with a client. They set goals, did a thorough assessment, created a plan, made adjustments as needed and continuously evaluated their progress. To them, there was no other way to go about it, and as Amit stated, "Occupational therapy is a way of life! It's embedded in us!" I asked them to walk me through the process and this is what it looked like:

**Setting a goal:** To support their growing family and enhance their careers by beginning a private occupational therapy practice.



Lakshmi Gupta and Amit Kumar

**Assessment:** With Lakshmi taking care of their children and home, Amit set out into the community to begin a rigorous community market needs assessment. He used his strong people skills to make connections in the community by offering free workshops and lectures in care homes, retirement homes and health centres. As a result, Amit was able to have many discussions with community members, health-care providers and service users regarding how best to serve his community. Over time, he was able to charge a small fee for a therapeutic stroke survivors group. The couple also researched other businesses in the community and investigated what services were being provided and which ones were in demand. Through these comprehensive assessments, they were able to develop a presence within the community and identify service gaps.

**Planning and implementation:** Life Skills Therapy started by providing occupational therapy within the insurance sector, but quickly expanded to providing general community occupational therapy consultations. Since 2011, the in-home business has grown from consisting of two occupational therapists (Amit and Lakshmi) to employing 10 occupational therapists, 6 kinesiologists and 1 administrator who all work in the community.

**Evaluation:** Lakshmi's methodical and systematic approach to both occupational therapy and business, combined with Amit's ever-growing visions for the future, meant they were always evaluating their performance and adapting their strategies as needed to allow for growth. This has allowed them to begin their most recent endeavour, opening a neurorehabilitation clinic, called Neurofunction Rehab, that uses modern rehabilitation technologies, such as virtual reality, and doubles as the headquarters for Life Skills Therapy.

## Support from CAOT

Amit and Lakshmi described that when they feel stuck or unsure about how to move forward, they turn to resources available through CAOT and CAOT-BC. They routinely make use of the CAOT-BC private practice network, the many position statements (often citing the positions statements on return to work or pain management), resources for professional conduct, professional education opportunities (such as upcoming and archived webinars and workshops) and the CAOT career listings to advertise occupational therapy positions (see links to resources below). Quite simply, "CAOT supports you," said Amit. CAOT has been their primary source of resources to support their success as private practice occupational therapists and entrepreneurs.

## Words of advice and a glimpse to the future

I asked Amit and Lakshmi for advice they might give to other occupational therapists who are looking to make a practice-area change or take a risk like beginning a private practice. Amit told me that if you're doing it for the money then it is not going to work; you need to "identify your true interests, follow what comes naturally, and just... start!" While Lakshmi's advice echoed Amit's in the assertion that it is important to "take things easy, let go and allow things to fall into place on their own," she was very clear that that doing the research, making a plan, being unafraid to meet people and asking questions are paramount to finding success in taking risks.

Going forward, Amit and Lakshmi want to give back to the profession that has served them so well. They look forward to expanding their businesses to cover all of Lower Mainland British Columbia, taking student occupational therapists at their new rehabilitation facility, supporting research by establishing a bursary program, offering workshops and striving to become a centre of excellence. In 10 years, the pair envisions transferring some of their workload to on-site managers and enjoying some time to travel.

## Private practice resources at CAOT

If you are an occupational therapist providing private services, or are considering entering the private sector, CAOT has many resources, tools, materials and opportunities for mentorship that can support your career:

- Private practice resources can be found at: <http://www.caot.ca/default.asp?pageid=2039>
- Information about the CAOT-BC Private Practice Business Network can be found at: <http://www.caot.ca/default.asp?pageid=4217>
- To learn more about the CAOT Private Practice Network for OTs practicing outside of British Columbia, email: [education@caot.ca](mailto:education@caot.ca)
- CAOT professional development resources and events can be found at: <http://www.caot.ca/default.asp?pageid=2424>
- Career listings can be found at: [http://www.caot.ca/CAOT\\_career\\_listings.asp?pageid=1001](http://www.caot.ca/CAOT_career_listings.asp?pageid=1001)
- If you have private practice questions, contact CAOT's director of professional practice at: [practice@caot.ca](mailto:practice@caot.ca)