

Retired Professor of Occupational Therapy Glen Gillen of Columbia University Recently Featured on Close Up Radio

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EINPresswire.com/ -- After a distinguished 40-year career spanning clinical practice, research, and academia, Glen Gillen, EdD, OTR, FAOTA, retired professor at Columbia University, shares insights on the evolution of occupational therapy (OT) and his ongoing contributions to the profession. With a background rooted in both hands-on rehabilitation and authorship of foundational texts, Gillen's work has significantly shaped practice standards and education for OT practitioners worldwide.

A Career Built on Everyday
Participation



Gillen began his OT practice in the 1980s, when the profession was still largely misunderstood. "People used to think OT was about finding jobs," Gillen recalls, "but it's really therapy that enables people to participate in daily activities, from basics like getting out of bed to more complex roles like parenting and returning to work." This practical, client-centered approach became the hallmark of his clinical philosophy.

His early fascination with the brain led him to specialize in neurological and stroke rehabilitation. "I've always been captivated by how the brain—though small—governs everything from emotion to movement," says Gillen. "Neurological rehab is never repetitive because every patient is different, which forces therapists to constantly learn."

Bridging Clinical Practice, Research, and Teaching

Throughout his career, Gillen maintained a dual role as both clinician and academic, treating patients in the mornings and teaching students in the afternoons. “My students appreciated that my teaching was practical and grounded in real-world experience,” he notes. “Research, practice, and teaching were never separate for me—they informed one another.”

Gillen emphasizes that in OT, patient-centered care means recognizing that clients are the true experts in their lives. “Regardless of what textbooks say, each patient’s experience is unique. We work with clients to set their own therapy goals based on what matters most to them.”

Authoring Foundational Literature

Gillen’s writings have left a lasting mark on the field. His first book, “Stroke Rehabilitation: A Function-Based Approach,” is now in its fifth edition and used globally. “Writing that book at the age of 28 was about filling a gap—I wanted resources that truly helped patients. Today, evidence-based and client-centered practice is the foundation of my approach.”

He later edited and contributed to multiple editions of Willard & Spackman’s “Occupational Therapy,” the primary OT textbook worldwide. “Keeping these resources current is vital, but I will be stepping aside with this project as I’m no longer seeing patients regularly. Authenticity matters.”

With over 250 research articles and book chapters to his name, Gillen has provided guidance on topics ranging from cognitive and perceptual rehabilitation to practical strategies for caregivers. “My earliest research, such as on coordination challenges in MS, continues to be cited today. It’s rewarding to know these contributions are still relevant.”

Observing Change and Addressing Systemic Barriers

Having witnessed the AIDS epidemic, advances in MS treatment, and evolving attitudes toward patient autonomy, Gillen reflects on medicine’s progress and its persistent challenges. “Medical miracles have changed the rehab landscape, but today, the biggest gaps are financial—access to care remains a serious issue,” he shares.

He also sees the demands of documentation and productivity metrics as detracting from quality care. “Time with patients is being squeezed, which isn’t in anyone’s best interest. OT is about relationships, and magic happens in those moments.”

Commitment to Service and the Next Chapter

Gillen’s commitment extends beyond academia. He played a pivotal role in the Columbia Health and Homeless Medical Partnership (CHHMP), bringing OT services to underserved populations in Harlem. “It’s some of the most meaningful work I’ve done, helping those with the least access to care.”

Since retiring from full-time teaching, Gillen remains active through guest lectures, ongoing writing projects, and is planning to volunteer with youth arts programs in Hell's Kitchen as well as animal support organizations. "I'm not ready to fully retire. I want to keep giving back—whether through mentorship, writing, or community service."

A Message for Future Practitioners

For those entering OT or healthcare, Gillen's message is clear: "Don't choose this career for the money. I am rich because the rewards come from never wanting to call in sick, from being excited by each day's new challenges, and from making a difference in people's lives."

About Glen Gillen

Glen Gillen, EdD, OTR, FAOTA, is a retired professor of occupational therapy at Columbia University, author, and clinical specialist in neurological rehabilitation. His books and research articles have become core resources for OT education and practice worldwide. He continues to contribute to the profession as a writer, lecturer, and volunteer.

Close Up Radio recently featured Glen Gillen in a two-part interview with Jim Masters on Wednesday November 5th at 2pm EST, and with Doug Llewelyn on Wednesday November 12th at 2pm EST

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For more information about Glen Gillen, please visit <https://www.24-7pressrelease.com/press-release/527202/marquis-whos-who-honors-glen-gillen-edd-otr-faota-for-expertise-in-health-care-and-higher-education/>

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