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STUDY: MOST UNIVERSITY STUDENTS SELF-REPORT DISCOMFORT, PAIN DUE TO BACKPACK USAGE

Occupational Therapy Industry Reminds Students to “Pack It Light, Wear It Right”

(Bethesda, MD) — Approximately 85 percent of university students self-report discomfort and pain associated with backpack usage, according to research conducted at Boston University. This study confirms assertions occupational therapy practitioners make annually on National School Backpack Awareness Day, this year on Wednesday, September 17, on which special events are held in communities throughout the country to educate students on the proper way to wear a backpack and how much weight to carry.

Dr. Karen Jacobs, EdD, CPE, OTR/L, FAOTA, a former American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) president and board certified professional ergonomist; her colleague Dr. Michael Pencina; and graduate student June Mung Yuing Hu found that the most common anatomical zones of discomfort were the shoulder, lower back, upper middle back and neck. While the incidence did not reach statistical significance in their study, Jacobs notes that there might be an emerging trend between symptoms and time spent carrying backpacks.

“Most students – in fact, 84 percent of the study participants – are aware of the potential consequences of incorrect backpack usage,” said Jacobs. “There is a pressing need to better educate students on how to prevent discomfort, which is the purpose of National School Backpack Awareness Day each year.”

How do you know if your backpack is too heavy? Jacobs recommends a loaded backpack weigh no more than 10 to 15 percent (about one-sixth) of a student’s body weight (i.e., for a student weighing 100 pounds, this means the backpack should weigh no more than 15 pounds).

“Carry water bottles empty and fill them before class. Carry only what you need and leave the rest in your room,” said Jacobs when asked how to help keep the weight off.

For more information about National School Backpack Awareness day, visit http://www.promoteot.org/AI_BackpackAwareness.html. Contact the AOTA Media Relations Office to find an event in your area.

Note: Video footage and audio sound bites of Dr. Karen Jacobs explaining tips on how to buy, pack and carry a backpack are available courtesy of Boston University upon request.

Founded in 1917, the **American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA)** represents the interests and concerns of more than 36,000 occupational therapists, assistants and students nationwide. The Association educates the public and advances the profession of occupational therapy by providing resources, setting standards including accreditations and serving as an advocate to improve health care. Based in Bethesda, Md., AOTA’s major programs and activities are directed toward promoting the professional development of its members and assuring consumer access to quality services so patients can maximize their individual potential. For more information, go to www.aota.org.