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## The Multifaceted Role of Speech-Language Pathologists in the USA

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Wieloaspektowa rola logopedów w USA

**Summary:** The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is a professional association that supports professionals that provide services across a broad range of communication sciences and disorders including speech-language pathologists, audiologists, speech, language and hearing scientists and support personnel including speech-language pathology assistants and audiology assistants. ASHA's key areas of focus for the future of speech-language pathology includes educating members and faculty to prepare graduate students for practice in these changed arenas. The purpose of the article is to show how ASHA is actively involved globally and locally in establishing standards and providing services in several domains including prevention and wellness, screening, assessment, treatment, collaboration with other professionals, counselling and modalities, technology and instrumentation as well as population and systems.

**Keywords:** speech pathology; audiology; ASHA

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is a professional association that supports professionals that provide services across a broad range of communication sciences and disorders including speech-language pathologists, audiologists, speech, language and hearing scientists and support personnel including speech-language pathology assistants and audiology assistants. During recent years, the United States has experienced significant changes in

reimbursement procedures within health care and educational settings. These changes impact how professionals conduct business. The Bureau of Labor and Statistics estimates that between 2008 and 2018 the U.S. will experience a 19% growth in number of SLP positions – from 119,300 to 141,400.

ASHA has also experienced growth in the number of members that have joined the organization this year. More than 156,000 certified speech-language pathologists are ASHA members. More than half (55.3%) of the SLPs are employed in educational settings including schools and universities. An additional 39.3% are employed in health care settings<sup>1</sup>.

ASHA's key areas of focus for the future of speech-language pathology include educating members and faculty to prepare graduate students for practice in these changed arenas. ASHA has a Strategic Pathway to Excellence which is a plan to achieve the association's envisioned future by the year 2025. The eight prioritized objectives are:

1. Enhanced data and outcomes to improve practice and drive value.
2. Support IPE and foster IPP.
3. Increased generation and application of research.
4. Enhanced service delivery across the continuum of care.
5. Greater influence on the value of SLP and Audiology services.
6. More diverse membership.
7. Enhanced international engagement.
8. Increased cultural competence.

By focusing resources, time and attention on these priorities ASHA is committed to helping to prepare and empower speech-language pathologists to be prepared to meet the challenges of the future.

Enhancing the delivery of services across the continuum to maximize value and access includes developing new resources and disseminating information and tracking implementation data for support personnel usage and telepractice engagement and top of the license practice.

Reframing the speech-language pathology profession involves a reconsideration of the clinical paradigm and an expansion beyond traditional service models including consultations; changing from deficit or impairment to context-based effectiveness; fully adopting the International Classification of Function (ICF) framework; developing functional goals that target meaningful activities that a person cannot perform or avoids performing as a result of health condition;

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<sup>1</sup> American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, *ASHA Summary Membership and Affiliation Counts, Year-end 2015*, 2016, [www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org), accessed: 29 II 2016; American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, *Scope of Practice in Speech-Language Pathology*, 2016, [www.asha.org/policy](http://www.asha.org/policy), accessed: 29 II 2016.

maximizing functional improvement or individual outcomes, increased engagement with individuals and their families. Specify education, training, credentialing and supervisory requirements for Speech-Language Pathology Assistants (SLPAs) and including them in the service continuum. This is applicable to all service delivery settings including schools, health care, private practices, homes, early intervention centers and skilled nursing facilities.

Council for Clinical Certification Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology defines the standards for clinical certification; applies those standards in the certification of individuals; and may also develop and administer a credentialing program for speech-language pathology assistants. Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC-A, CCC-SLP) requires a graduate degree from accredited program plus a rigorous test – based on validated studies of required knowledge, skills, and tasks – updated regularly. Certificate holders have met rigorous academic and professional standards and the benefits include increased opportunities for employment, mobility, career advancement, professional credibility recognized by nearly every state's regulatory agency; and assures that holders are keeping up with changes in field.

The Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology, which is a semi-autonomous body within ASHA (CAA). The CAA formulates standards for the accreditation of graduate educational programs that provide entry-level professional preparation in audiology or speech-language pathology.

ASHA is actively engaged globally in several ways. Some examples include the following:

1. Collaborating with colleagues in international associations to address issues of terminology and Autism and Communication Disorders.
2. Sharing information regarding the World Report on Disability.
3. Exchanging practice information with colleagues across the globe.
4. World Health Organization (WHO):
  - Non-Governmental Organization of the Pan American Health Organization – WHO working with colleagues in Central America,
  - Participation in the WHO-Disability and Rehabilitation Partners Network.
5. Member of the Institute of Medicine Global Forum on Health Professional Education.
6. Member of IALP.
7. Founding member of International Communication Project.

Speech-language pathologists in the U.S. provide services in several domains including prevention and wellness, screening, assessment, treatment, collaborate

with other professionals, counseling and modalities, technology and instrumentation as well as population and systems.

Prevention and wellness is vital for everyone, speech-language pathologists play a significant role in reducing the incidence of disorders, early identification of program and decreasing the impact of a disability with an existing condition. SLPs promote programs to increase the public's awareness of risk behaviors that lead to communication disorders and feeding/swallowing problems.

Screening individuals for possible communication disorders early is important. If someone is suspected of having a communication disorder, conducting an assessment. During an assessment the SLP obtains information regarding the individual across the communication disorders and feeding and swallowing. Tools and resources are used as well as questioning to obtain as much information as possible. A review of charts, case histories and documentation in the patient/students records provide information that helps the SLP make a diagnosis and determine the specific areas that are problematic and warrant attention through consultation, indirect or direct intervention strategies.

Treatment strategies that have been deemed successful and appropriate based on the evidence and that the patient is able to successful utilize need to be determined by the speech-language pathologist. The actual practice to stabilize skills can be done with extenders including speech-language pathology assistants, rehabilitation aides, special educators, and family members.

Counseling are skills that are often needed for several communication disorders and associated conditions. While speech-language pathologists are not trained counselors, they learn counseling strategies and when to make appropriate referrals to other professionals.

Being familiar the varied modalities, technology and instrumentation for use in the clinical arena is important for effectiveness and efficiencies. The availability of different resources continues to evolve daily and SLPs need to be proactive in reviewing the availability and appropriateness of resources available to enhance speech-language therapy clinical services. The range of augmentative and alternative communication technologies available to assist individuals living with impaired abilities to communicate verbally within their home environments and communities are numerous and can be challenging to select the best device for an individual. SLPs are integral participants to assist individual with deciphering each of the considerations.

The diversity of patient populations and types of systems being implemented are continuing to grow as well. SLPs provide services in indirect ways and contribute to the use of plain language to facilitate clear communication that results in improved health and educationally relevant outcomes for individuals. Work

environments are changing and the role of SLPs in changing work environments and contributors to electronic health records to name two very different systems requires communication and clear statements of roles and responsibilities of the participants.

There are numerous service delivery options that speech-language pathologists may choose to utilize across the continuum of care. The approaches that are best for an individual should be based on the evidence and practice with the patient. Practicing at the top of the license is a concept of the credential professional asking what are my specific knowledge and skills needed to do. The answer includes diagnosis, assessment and development of an appropriate treatment plan using strategies that are successful with the individual but can be practiced by someone else with monitoring by the independent practitioner.

Using support personnel to extend the services of the independent practitioner is one method of practicing at the top of the license. Support personnel should be appropriate trained and supervised to engage in different treatment approaches and monitor and document the practice of skills being acquired by the individual. It is important that the credential professional monitors the notes and progress and makes recommendations for changes in treatment strategies. Working with family members is also another opportunity to enhance appropriate practice of the desired skills. It is important that regular communication occurs with input for any changes that need to be implemented and modeled by the clinician.

Consultations with other professionals and with individuals/clients/patients provides opportunities to monitor progress make changes to intervention strategies and to collaborate with other professionals, family members and individuals.

Intensive treatment frequencies are often challenging to schedule but can be beneficial to a patient and allow the brain pathways to remap thereby affording the patient with sustained behaviors.

Interprofessional Practice is an appropriate way of delivering services that are coordinated and not unnecessarily duplicative. Professionals from different disciplines can work well together to facilitate an individual's achievement of target outcomes. Regular communication is a crucial component of effective collaborative practice.

Telepractice provides an alternative method of accessing the clinician. Individuals that live in remote areas or have difficulty transporting from one location to another frequently can benefit from services delivered via telepractice. The types of equipment and software as well as support at the site of the individual patient require planning and coordination.

Working with individuals that are at home or in another location from the SLP increasing access to services reduces travel time for individuals and maximizes opportunities to improve function.

Using the ICF framework to write functional goals is a comprehensive approach that provides the clinician with an overall view of the individual as a context for writing specific functional goals in the area of communication or swallowing.

Additionally, professional skills are needed to augment specific clinical knowledge and skills to facilitate best practice by speech-language pathologists. Supervision of other clinicians, support personnel and students is an integral component of the SLPs responsibilities. Where do SLPs learn the specific knowledge and skills to supervise individuals in each of these categories? The response varies. Most learn on the job and through professional development activities. It is important that SLPs acquire the requisite knowledge and skills regarding the responsibilities that each category of individual as appropriate to participate. Graduate students require regular meetings, direct and indirect supervision of all types of activities ranging from screening, assessment, treatment and documentation of services. They need supervision regarding frequency and intensity of treatment as well as data collection procedures.

Support personnel need specific supervision and guidance regarding what activities are within and outside of their scope of practice in addition to both direct and indirect supervision of them performing their tasks.

Education and mentoring is critical to clinical practice and acquisition of clinical competence. SLPs encounter different patient types, service delivery settings and options and having the opportunity to communicate routinely with a knowledgeable and competent SLP is germane to developing more professional confidence, attitudes as well as specific knowledge and skills.

In conclusion, there are many elements that contribute to the changes in the manner in which speech-language pathologists practice. The work settings, collaborative team, evidence to support successful intervention, data collection systems, health literacy and documentation requirements to name a few. Communication and eating are both very important to functioning for individuals across the life span. Speech-language pathologists scope of practice includes each of these and how we facilitate a person's successful functioning varies based on the needs of the individual. Technological advances also contribute to enhanced opportunities and require SLPs to continue to learn new information and resources. It is an exciting time to practice as an SLP in the United States and globally. The priorities, locations and specific approaches that are utilized can vary across the globe. Culturally appropriate intervention and patient focused

intervention are priorities that impact the targets of services for individuals. Additional evidence that supports efficacious practice continues to be obtained and reported in the literature for clinicians to access. Clinicians continue to be engaged contributors to the evidence in speech-language pathology. Sharing information across borders helps to advance the profession and educates us about the challenges faced in different countries as well as successful strategies employed across the globe to facilitate individual's achievement of their functional outcomes.

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**Streszczenie:** American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (Amerykańskie Stowarzyszenie Mowy i Słuchu – ASHA) jest stowarzyszeniem, które wspiera specjalistów świadczących usługi w szerokim zakresie nauk o komunikacji i jej zaburzeniach oraz logopedów, audiologów, naukowców i pracowników personelu pomocniczego, zajmujących się problematyką głosu, mowy i słuchu, w tym asystentów logopedów i asystentów audiologów. Kluczowe obszary działalności ASHA, skupiające się na przyszłości logopedii, obejmują edukację członków oraz jednostek kształcących logopedów w celu przygotowania absolwentów do praktyki w wymienionych obszarach. Celem artykułu jest ukazanie, jak ASHA jest aktywnie zaangażowana (globalnie i lokalnie) w tworzenie standardów i świadczenie usług w wielu dziedzinach, jak profilaktyka i odnowa biologiczna, badania przesiewowe, diagnozy, leczenie, współpraca z innymi specjalistami, poradnictwo i sposoby wykorzystania technologii oraz oprzyrządowania specjalistycznego zarówno dla społeczeństwa, jak i organizacji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** logopedia; audiologia; ASHA