



The Role of Speech-Language Pathologists in Dysphagia

Position Statement

It is the position of Speech-Language and Audiology Canada that speech-language pathologists take the primary role in the evaluation and treatment of dysphagia of the upper aerodigestive tract, which includes the oral, pharyngeal and upper esophageal anatomical regions. Speech-language pathologists address feeding and swallowing impairments across the lifespan, from birth to the end of life. Given the complexity of dysphagia and the effects it has on a person's health, quality of life and social interactions, speech-language pathologists employ a collaborative and holistic approach to dysphagia intervention.

Background

Speech-language pathologists have long been regarded as the foremost professionals in dysphagia assessment and management and are leaders in dysphagia research endeavours. Innovations from the field of speech-language pathology have led to the introduction and advancement of instrumental assessment techniques and evidence-based interventions for dysphagia.

In addition to their extensive knowledge of head and neck anatomy, speech-language pathologists complete rigorous academic and clinical education in dysphagia as well as speech, voice, resonance, language and cognitive communication disorders. Since there is a high co-occurrence rate of communication disorders and dysphagia, as well as increased risk of aspiration for patients with underlying language and cognitive impairment, speech-language pathologists are best positioned to offer comprehensive care to patients or clients with dysphagia.

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