

## Communication Health Assistants Working Collaboratively With Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists

Communication health assistants play an important role in the delivery of audiology and speech-language pathology services. Communication health assistants work under the supervision of qualified speech-language pathologists or audiologists and work in collaborative teams, adding value, efficiency and effectiveness to service delivery. Communication health assistants support the treatment of patients and clients from various populations; they include audiology assistants, speech-language pathology assistants and speech and hearing assistants.

### Considerations for speech-language pathologists (S-LPs), audiologists and communication health assistants entering into a working relationship:

*(Details on the points below can be found in the SAC S-LP Assistant Guidelines and the SAC Audiology Assistant Guidelines)*

- 1. Supervision:** Supervising S-LPs/audiologists and communication health assistants will decide on a schedule of direct and indirect supervision that meets required guidelines and promotes the best care for patients or clients. The supervisor must document supervision but SAC recommends that the communication health assistant also maintain a record of supervision.
- 2. Scope of practice:** It is the responsibility of supervising S-LPs/audiologists to ensure that communication health assistants are assigned activities that are within their scope of practice. Supervising S-LPs/audiologists and communication health assistants must follow SAC's guidelines if they are members or associates of the association. Any provincial/territorial or regulatory guidelines that are in place supersede the SAC guidelines if differences exist. In addition, supervising S-LPs/audiologists and communication health assistants must adhere to the policies and procedures that exist within their workplace. When assigning activities, supervisors must consider the following:
  - Can the activity be assigned under applicable legislation?
  - Is the activity suitable and safe for assignment?
  - Is the communication health assistant the best person to perform the activity?
  - Can monitoring and evaluation requirements be met?
  - Has the client consented to working with a communication health assistant?

- 3. Roles and consent:** Patients or clients must be informed of the role of the communication health assistant and the supervising S-LP/audiologist prior to the beginning of treatment. Patients or clients must be advised that they may contact the supervising S-LP/audiologist at any time regarding their care. When communication health assistants receive questions that are outside of their scope of practice, they will forward them to the supervisor for response.
- 4. Screening and treatment:** Communication health assistants may perform screening, treatment procedures and other activities assigned by supervising S-LPs/audiologists. Supervisors must approve any modifications to treatment plans in advance.
- 5. Liability insurance:** In some cases, the S-LP/audiologist's professional liability insurance may cover communication health assistants working with their patients or clients. Communication health assistants should ask their supervisor about coverage, particularly whether or not the communication health assistant must be listed by name under the S-LP/audiologist's coverage. SAC highly recommends that communication health assistants purchase their own professional liability coverage. [Professional liability insurance](#) is available through SAC for S-LPs, audiologists and communication health assistants at significantly discounted rates.
- 6. Licensure/regulation:** At this time, communication health assistants are not regulated/licensed in Canada. In provinces where S-LPs and audiologists are regulated, communication health assistants must be supervised by a member of the regulatory body.
- 7. Quality of care:** S-LPs/audiologists and communication health assistants must follow applicable standards and uphold the basic tenets of providing quality services such as keeping accurate notes, monitoring and documenting progress, maintaining patient or client confidentiality, abiding by the SAC Code of Ethics and practicing in a safe manner.
- 8. Compensation:** Supervising S-LPs/audiologists should discuss and clearly outline compensation for hours of work, travel time and preparation time with communication health assistants. This is especially important when working within the private practice setting.

Supervising S-LPs/audiologists are ultimately responsible for services provided to their patients or clients and must be confident in the quality of services their communication health assistants provide. Communication health assistants must be comfortable with their competence in providing services, the nature of the assigned tasks, the outlined treatment goals and the amount and type of supervision provided by S-LPs/audiologists. S-LPs/audiologists and communication health assistants must feel comfortable in requesting a review of the working arrangement at any time.