Using Speech-Language Pathology Assistants

What may speech-language pathology assistants do?

According to ASHA’s Guidelines for Training, Use, and Supervision of Speech-Language Pathology Assistants, which apply across all practice settings, a speech-language pathology assistant may conduct the following tasks under the supervision of a speech-language pathologist:

■ Assist speech-language and hearing screenings (without interpretation)
■ Assist with informal documentation as directed by the speech-language pathologist
■ Follow documented treatment plans or protocols developed by the supervising speech-language pathologist
■ Document patient/client performance (e.g., tallying data for the speech-language pathologist to use; preparing charts, records, and graphs) and report this information to the supervision speech-language pathologist
■ Assist the speech-language pathologist during assessment of patients/clients
■ Assist with clerical duties such as preparing materials and scheduling activities as directed by the speech-language pathologist
■ Perform checks and maintenance of equipment
■ Support the supervising speech-language pathologist in research projects, in-service training, and public relations programs
■ Assist with departmental operations (scheduling, record keeping, safety/maintenance of supplies and equipment)
■ Collect data for monitoring quality improvement
■ Exhibit compliance with regulations, reimbursement requirements, and speech-language pathology assistant’s job responsibilities

State laws vary and may differ from ASHA guidelines. Check specific state regulations.

What is outside of speech-language pathology assistants' scope of responsibilities?

According to ASHA’s Guidelines for Training, Use, and Supervision of Speech-Language Pathology Assistants, a speech-language pathology assistant may not perform the following tasks:

■ May not perform standardized or nonstandardized diagnostic tests, formal or informal evaluations, or clinical interpretation of test results
■ May not screen or diagnose patients/clients for feeding/swallowing disorders
May not participate in parent conferences, case conferences, or any interdisciplinary team without the presence of the supervising speech-language pathologist or other ASHA-certified speech-language pathologist designated by the supervising speech-language pathologist.

May not write, develop, or modify a patient/client's individualized treatment plan in any way.

May not assist with patients/clients without following the individualized treatment plan prepared by the speech-language pathologist or without access to supervision.

May not sign any formal documents (e.g., treatment plans, reimbursement forms, or reports; the assistant should sign or initial informal treatment notes for review and co-signature by the supervising professional).

May not select patients/clients for service.

May not discharge a patient/client from services.

May not disclose clinical or confidential information either orally or in writing to anyone other than the supervising speech-language pathologist.

May not make referrals for additional service.

May not counsel or consult with the patient/client, family or others regarding the patient/client status or service.

May not use a checklist or tabulate results of feeding or swallowing evaluations.

May not demonstrate swallowing strategies or precautions to patients, family, or staff.

May not represent himself or herself as a speech-language pathologist.

State laws vary and may differ from ASHA guidelines. Check specific state regulations to determine which tasks are outside the scope of responsibilities for assistants in a particular state.