



SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY FACT SHEET

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers comprehensive speech-language pathology services to Veterans and Servicemembers. VA speech-language pathologists are professionals dedicated to providing high quality, comprehensive, caring and timely services to individuals who have a wide range of communication and swallowing disorders. Speech-language pathology services include the early identification or screening, evaluation, and treatment for speech, swallowing, language, voice and cognitive- communication disorders. Services are provided based on applying the best available research evidence, using expert clinical judgment and considering the patient's individual preferences and values.

CLINICAL ACTIVITIES

Speech-language pathologists are involved in the screening, evaluation and treatment of a broad range of communication and swallowing disorders, including:

Speech Disorders: When a person is unable to produce speech sounds precisely or fluently then he or she may have a speech disorder. Difficulty pronouncing sounds, or articulation disorders, and stuttering are examples of speech disorders. Speech-language pathologists also offer services for accent modification. A regional or foreign accent may impact the way an individual is understood at school or work and may benefit from treatment.

Language Disorders: Difficulty understanding the spoken language and verbal expression is often due to brain injury such as a stroke or traumatic brain injury. Aphasia is a language disorder frequently seen after trauma to the left hemisphere of the brain and includes difficulty in speaking, listening, reading, writing, and gesturing, but does not affect intelligence.

Cognitive Disorders: Cognitive problems include difficulty with attention, memory, orientation, organization, and problem-solving. A speech-language pathologist will work with the patient and their family to improve cognitive skills or to develop compensatory strategies designed to improve ability to function at home, school, and work.

Voice Disorders: Speech-language pathologists provide evaluation and treatment for disorders of voice including pitch, loudness, and nasal resonance. Speech-language pathologists also assist transgender and intersex Veterans and Servicemembers to modify aspects of voice and communication in a manner consistent with their identified gender.



Swallowing Problems (Dysphagia): Speech-language pathologists specialize in swallowing disorders or dysphagia and evaluate individuals who are experiencing problems with eating and drinking. Dysphagia may co-exist with a wide variety of neurological or structural problems and treatment may include modification of food or liquids, positioning while eating, or exercises to improve swallow function.

Assistive Technology: Speech-language pathologists are specialists in providing recommendations for a wide range of technology for individuals that are unable to speak or may need compensatory strategies to assist with memory or organization. Examples of assistive technology include a picture board paired with a laser pointer, utilization of applications (apps) for smart phones for a tablet, or a device that produces computerized speech accessed by an eye gaze switch.





MEDICAL CONDITIONS OR PATIENT POPULATIONS

Speech-language pathologists serve Veterans and Servicemembers of all ages with speech, language, and swallowing disorders that can result as a result many medical problems, including:

- Brain injury including a stroke or trauma to the head
- Progressive neurological disorders such as Parkinson’s Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), Huntington’s Disease, muscular dystrophy and dementia or Alzheimer’s disease
- Injury or surgery to the head and neck
- Oral and laryngeal cancer
- Laryngeal abnormalities such as vocal cord paresis or paralysis
- Spinal cord injury and dysfunction
- Respiratory compromise including tracheostomy and ventilator dependence

CLINICAL ENCOUNTERS

VA employs over 400 speech-language pathologists and offers services to over 158 sites of care throughout the VA Health Care System. VA Speech-Language Pathology had over 356,000 patient encounters in Fiscal Year 2014.

For more information, visit www.rehab.va.gov
May, 2015



TREATMENT SETTINGS

Speech-language pathologists often work as members of specialized interdisciplinary teams to provide coordinated, comprehensive care to Veterans and Servicemembers.

Speech-language pathology personnel provide services in outpatient clinics and inpatient settings (including medical centers and community living centers) and in their homes.



Telehealth is also available as a treatment modality to provide specialized treatment in settings closer to the individual’s home. This may involve telehealth services to VA outpatient clinics or the home.



HELPFUL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

- ✓ Get the person’s attention before you start speaking.
- ✓ Maintain eye contact and pay attention to the speaker while watching the person’s body language and use of gestures.
- ✓ Reduce distractions and minimize or eliminate background noise (T.V., radio)
- ✓ Keep your voice at a normal level. Do not speak loudly unless the person asks you to do so.
- ✓ Introduce the topic with a single word or short phrase before speaking in sentences.
- ✓ Give the individual time to speak. Resist the urge to finish sentences or offer words.
- ✓ If the person has trouble speaking, encourage communication with drawings, gestures, writing and facial expressions in addition to speech.
- ✓ If the person has difficulty understanding, check with the listener to make sure they understand you, simplify your sentences, or ask simple “yes” or “no” questions.
- ✓ Use calendars, clocks, and notepads to remind the person of important information.
- ✓ Encourage normal activities and independence to avoid overprotection.

