Speech and Language Therapy – Information Session

This information is a summary of what Speech & Language (S&L) Therapists do in the hospital setting.

There are many other settings in which S&L therapists work, for example: schools, and community rehabilitation. In addition, some S&L therapists work with children, others with adults, others with the elderly. The chosen client group and setting will affect the job role hugely.

Neurological Communication Disorders

Some S&L therapists will work with patients with disorders such as stroke, Parkinson’s disease, Huntington’s disease etc. This role includes:

- Diagnosing the type and severity of the disorder
- Using strategies to reduce the impairment
- Providing communication aids tailored to the person
- Assisting the patient and the family in understanding the condition
- Advising the multi-disciplinary team (e.g. doctors, physiotherapists) how best to interact with the patient
- Referring to other follow up support, e.g. the Stroke Association

Ideas for work experience in this area:
Stroke Association: www.stroke.org.uk
Headway: www.headway.org.uk/home.aspx

Stammering

Some S&L therapists work with people referred from their GP due to stammering. This role involves:

- Assessing the type of stammer
- Assessing the circumstances in which stammering occurs; when is it worse/what makes it better?
- Offering strategies to manage the stammer
- Counselling skills – restoring self-confidence

For more information:
British Stammering Association: www.stammering.org

Voice Disorders

Voice disorders are another area of the S&L therapist’s work. Voice disorders are changes and/or loss of voice, for example the voice becoming hoarse; loss of range; pain when talking. They can be caused by a number of factors, for example: smoking; overuse (common in teachers and singers); infection.

The S&L therapist’s role involves:

- Examining the larynx- what is the problem?
- Assessing the person: Getting a full history: where is the person using their voice, do they smoke; listen to them talking/singing - what is the cause of the problem?
- Therapy to help them use their voice in a safer way; e.g. at a lower pitch
Swallowing

Due to their knowledge of the relevant muscles, S&L therapists are also involved in working with those with difficulties swallowing (dysphagia). Examples include: those with learning disabilities, e.g. Down Syndrome; the elderly; those with head/neck cancer.

In a hospital setting, S&L therapists must:
- Assess swallows; are they swallowing properly or is food going into the airways?
- Why is this happening: e.g. slow swallow, lack of feeling on one side of mouth
- Manage the problem; for example: prescribe special diets; teach strategies e.g. tuck head while swallowing to close airways

The main focus is on stabilising the patient and making them as safe as possible.

Entry Requirements:

Speech and Language therapy training can be completed as a two year postgraduate qualification. Tuition fees are covered by the NHS for those accepted onto approved courses. Places are competitive though, so getting some relevant work/voluntary experience is a must! Contact local charities or your local hospital.

For more information

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapy: www.rcslt.org