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Roles of Speech-Language Pathologists in Swallowing and Feeding Disorders

Dysphagia Document Review and Revision Working Group

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**Roles of Speech-
Language
Pathologists in
Swallowing and
Feeding Disorders**

This position statement defines the role of speech-language pathologists in the evaluation and management of individuals with swallowing and feeding disorders and clarifies the scope and rationale for these services.

It is the position of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), that speech-language pathologists play a primary role in the evaluation and treatment of infants, children, and adults with swallowing and feeding disorders.

Given the high incidence and prevalence of dysphagia, and the potentially severe and even fatal consequences, appropriate diagnosis and management of swallowing and feeding disorders are critical. In addition, dysphagia's impact on health care economics, quality of life, and caregiver burden is significant.

Speech-language pathologists are knowledgeable about normal and abnormal anatomy, physiology, and neurophysiology of the upper aerodigestive tract responsible for respiration, swallowing, and speech. Their educational and clinical background prepares speech-language pathologists to assume a variety of roles with expertise related to evaluation and treatment of individuals with swallowing and feeding disorders. Appropriate roles for speech-language pathologists include, but are not limited to:

- Performing clinical feeding and swallowing evaluations.
- Performing instrumental assessments that delineate structures and dynamic functions of swallowing.
- Defining the abnormal swallowing anatomy and physiology and diagnosing swallowing disorders.
- Identifying additional disorders in the upper aerodigestive tract and making referrals to appropriate medical personnel.
- Making recommendations about management of swallowing and feeding disorders.
- Developing treatment plans for individuals with swallowing and feeding disorders.
- Providing treatment for swallowing and feeding disorders, documenting progress, and determining appropriate dismissal criteria.
- Teaching and counseling individuals and their families about swallowing and feeding disorders.
- Educating other professionals regarding the needs of individuals with dysphagia, and the speech-language pathologists' role in the evaluation and management of swallowing and feeding disorders.
- Serving as an integral part of a multidisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary team as appropriate.
- Advocating for services for individuals with swallowing and feeding disorders.
- Advancing the knowledge base on swallowing and swallowing disorders through research activities.