Adult Speech-Language Pathology Services in Health Care
How do speech-language pathologists (SLPs) help people?

• SLPs work with people who have trouble
  – speaking
  – listening
  – reading
  – writing
  – thinking
  – swallowing
Who are speech-language pathologists?

- SLPs in health care
  - Are certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)
  - Have a master’s or doctoral degree in speech-language pathology
  - Completed postgraduate clinical work
  - Passed a national examination
What do SLPs do?

• SLPs can
  – Test people to see if they have speech, language, thinking, or swallowing problems
  – Work with people to improve communication and swallowing
  – Talk with patients and families about the problems the patient is having and what can be done to help
  – Work with other professionals, like doctors, physical therapists, and dietitians
What do SLPs do? (continued)

• SLPs can
  – Help people find other ways to communicate (called augmentative and alternative communication, or AAC) when they can’t speak
  – Work with insurance companies to get services paid for
  – Do research to find new and better ways to treat patients with communication and swallowing disorders
Where do SLPs work?

- In health care, SLPs work in:
  - hospitals
  - rehabilitation hospitals
  - nursing homes
  - outpatient clinics
  - home health agencies
  - private practice
What causes speech, language, or swallowing problems?

- Communication and swallowing problems in adults can be caused by
  - stroke
  - head injury
  - diseases like Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, multiple sclerosis, and amyotrophic sclerosis (ALS)
  - breathing problems
  - head and neck cancer
  - vocal abuse (using the voice in the wrong way)
  - severe or long-term illness
Diagram of the Head and Neck
What types of disorders do SLPs treat?

• SLPs treat
  – **Aphasia** – problems speaking, understanding, reading, writing, or using numbers due to stroke or brain injury
  – **Apraxia** – problems controlling mouth muscles to speak clearly
  – **Cognitive-communication disorders** – problems with memory, reasoning, problem-solving, and attention
What types of disorders do SLPs treat? (continued)

• **Dysarthria** – weakness or tightness in speech muscles that cause slurred or very quiet speech that may be hard to understand

• **Voice disorders** – changes in how a person’s voice sounds
  – Higher or lower pitch
  – Hoarseness
  – Too soft or too loud
  – Unable to make sound
What types of disorders do SLPs treat? (continued)

• **Swallowing (Dysphagia)** – problems chewing or swallowing that can lead to
  - dehydration
  - malnutrition
  - food or liquid going into the airway, called aspiration
  - frequent pneumonia or respiratory infections
  - less enjoyment of eating
  - embarrassment when eating because of drooling or other problems
  - the need for tube feeding or other ways to get nutrition
Will speech-language pathology services help?

• Yes. People who receive SLP services make improvements in all health care settings.
  – 84% of people with a speech disorder (dysarthria or apraxia) made progress in the hospital or in rehab.
  – 81% of people with language problems after a stroke make improvements with outpatient services.
  – Over half of people in the hospital no longer needed a feeding tube after receiving swallowing treatment from an SLP.

Source: ASHA national Outcomes Measurement System (NOMS)
Who pays for speech-language pathology services?

- Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance companies pay for services from an SLP.
  - Coverage for services will vary
  - Not everything is covered
  - You need to check with your health insurance company to find out what is covered
For more information

• Go to ASHA’s Web site at www.asha.org/public for information on
  — speech, language, and swallowing disorders
  — insurance coverage for SLP services
  — how to find an SLP