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Ad Hoc Committee to Provide Technical Assistance to
the Ministry of Public Health (MPH) of Ecuador

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Final Report

Provide technical assistance to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Public Health (MPH) to educate service providers on communication disorders. By conducting training workshops and providing professional development courses

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Final Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Provide Technical Assistance to the Ministry of Public Health (MPH) of Ecuador

Prepared by Brenda Gorman, PhD, CCC-SLP, Ad Hoc Committee Chair (2019–2021)

This final report of the Ad Hoc Committee to provide technical assistance to the Ministry of Public Health (MPH) of Ecuador to educate service providers on communication disorders (hereafter, “the Ad Hoc Committee”) accomplishes three objectives: (1) summarizes the collaborative activities of the Ad Hoc Committee with the Ecuadorian MPH; (2) describes how these activities have served to support equity in access to high-quality audiology and speech-language pathology services; and (3) concludes with recommendations for continued activity and future collaborations.

Background

The country of Ecuador lies in the northern region of South America. It is bordered by Colombia to its north, Peru to its south and east, and the Pacific Ocean to its west. The country includes the well-known Galápagos Islands in the Pacific Ocean. Ecuador has a population of approximately 17.4 million people, and Spanish is the official language.

The Ecuadorian MPH, through the National Directorate of Disabilities, manages several initiatives—including

- (a) *The Process of Detection, Diagnosis, Intervention and Treatment of Hearing Impairments in Ecuador*, an initiative that is based on the document titled *Guide to Audiology Services, Rehabilitation of Language and Technical Aids*, and
- (b) *Instructions for the Application of Hearing Screenings*, an initiative that addresses the implementation of speech, language, hearing, feeding, and swallowing services in Ecuador.

These services are provided through three levels of health care: Level 1 (Basic Local Health Care Centers), Level 2 (Regional Hospitals), and Level 3 (Specialized Service Centers). In Ecuador, service providers have the professional titles of *phonoaudiologist* or *speech-language therapist*. Audiologists have a medical degree; there is currently only one audiologist in the country. As a result, phonoaudiologists or speech-language therapists provide the vast majority of audiology services. According to the MPH, 17 phonoaudiologists and 426 speech-language therapists work in this country. With these numbers, we can estimate that there is one phonoaudiologist per 2,500,000 residents and one speech-language therapist per 100,000 residents. In contrast, according to 2019 data regarding ASHA-certified professionals in the United States, we can estimate that there are 4.1 audiologists per 100,000 residents and 54.7 speech-language pathologists in the United States.

Ad Hoc Committee Members

- Brenda Gorman, PhD, CCC-SLP, Elmhurst University, Elmhurst, IL, Ad Hoc Committee Chair (2019–2021)
- Amanda Blackwell, SLPD, CCC-SLP, Speech-Language Pathologist, Antigua, Guatemala, Ad Hoc Committee Member (2020–2021)
- Jose Centeno, PhD, CCC-SLP, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, Ad Hoc Committee Member (2020)
- Lisa Domby, MS, CCC-SLP, Speech-Language Pathologist, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ad Hoc Committee Member (2020–2021)
- Laura Froeschke, PhD, CCC-SLP, Elmhurst University, Elmhurst, IL, Ad Hoc Committee Member (2021)

- Antonio LeBaron, MS, CCC-SLP, Autism Consultant/Bilingual Speech-Language Pathologist, Ad Hoc Committee Member (2019)
- Eliane Schochat, PhD, Audiologist, University of São Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil, Ad Hoc Committee Member (2020–2021) and liaison to International Issues Board
- Lily Waterston, Ex Officio, ASHA, Director, International Programs (2019–2021)

Charge

The charge of the Ad Hoc Committee was to provide technical assistance to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Public Health (MPH) to educate service providers on communication disorders. By conducting training workshops and providing professional development courses.

Timeline and Committee Activities

September 2019: As detailed in the site visit report submitted to ASHA in 2019, Brenda Gorman and Lily Waterston conducted the initial on-site assessment in Quito, Ecuador. They supported MPH representatives in developing the work plan for the ASHA–PAHO collaboration. This work plan involved (1) provision of professional development training for Ecuadorian phonoaudiologists and speech-language therapists; (2) academic networking, including the inclusion of Ecuadorian university faculty in the professional development training; and (3) accessibility to all training content and “train-the-trainer” materials to support project outcomes and sustainability.

October–December 2019: Brenda Gorman and Lily Waterston identified and confirmed members of the Ad Hoc Committee to support the content areas of need as indicated by MPH representatives and the Ecuadorian phonoaudiologists and speech-language therapists interviewed during the on-site visit.

January 2020: The Ad Hoc Committee met virtually to plan their professional development centered on five content areas, which they planned to deliver during Summer 2020. The intent was for committee members who could travel to present in Ecuador face-to-face and for those who could not travel to present virtually. The members planned to compile digital resources available in Spanish and to supplement training content by creating additional needed materials in Spanish. The five content areas for professional development were grouped into training modules as follows:

- Module 1: Cochlear Implants
- Module 2: Feeding and Swallowing in Infants
- Module 3: Language and Literacy in Children
- Module 4: Aphasiology
- Module 5: Augmentative and Alternative Communication Systems and Autism

February–March 2020: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic increased and dominated MPH’s attention.

March–May 2020: Discussion with MPH determined that the mode of training delivery would need to shift entirely to virtual. The start date changed multiple times due to the need for MPH to prioritize COVID-19 needs—requiring that the project extend beyond the 1-year mark—and ASHA approved an extension by another year. The Ad Hoc Committee consulted with MPH to develop the full training schedule, and MPH developed the list of 63 invited participants. These participants included 53 MPH phonoaudiologists, speech-

language therapists, and their zonal leaders from three regional zones with the largest cities (Zone 6 – Cuenca, Zone 8 – Guayaquil, and Zone 9 – Quito), and training coverage incorporated all three levels of care (basic local health care centers, regional hospitals, and specialized service centers) and 10 university faculty members from audiology and speech-language pathology programs in Ecuador. Although participants served different populations with different disorders in various settings, MPH determined that it was important for all participants to benefit from the unique training opportunity—thus, the 53 participants working through MPH were required to complete all five training modules.

October–December 2020: The Ad Hoc Committee members delivered their trainings to all 63 invited participants, for a total of 30 hours of professional development across the five training modules. The training program included both synchronous and asynchronous activities, discussion, independently completed homework, and trainer feedback. Trainers and participants utilized Google Classroom as their learning management system—within this system, trainers were able to communicate with participants, trainers were able to make all content accessible, and participants were able to submit their work. At the end of each module, participants completed an online assessment to verify course completion and achievement of learning objectives. Upon verification of completion, MPH then sent participants official recognition of their completion. An excerpt of the published 2020 program with the training content and schedule is provided in the Appendix, followed by an automatic Google translation from Spanish to English.

January 2021: MPH was pleased with the execution and outcomes of the trainings and requested that the Ad Hoc Committee provide a second round of training to MPH professionals in additional regional zones of Ecuador. One committee member was unable to continue the commitment, and ASHA identified and approved Laura Froeschke to cover training in the content area of aphasiology.

February–May 2021: The COVID epidemic continued to challenge MPH professionals and key personnel. Therefore, after numerous revisions to the start dates, the team planned to deliver the second round of trainings during Summer 2021. MPH developed the list of 48 invited phonoaudiologists, speech-language therapists, and their zonal leaders from Zones 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7—again representing all three levels of health care settings.

June–August 2021: The Ad Hoc Committee members delivered trainings to all 48 invited participants, for a condensed total of 18 hours of professional development across the five training modules. The Ad Hoc Committee adjusted the training program to include primarily synchronous activities, discussion, and homework. Following completion of each module’s online assessment and verification, MPH sent official recognition of participants’ professional development completion. Google Classroom remained in place as the successful learning management system for (a) communication, (b) sharing of training materials for participants and (c) free download and continued use by future trainers. See Appendix for an excerpt of the published 2021 program with the training content and schedule, followed by a Google translation from Spanish to English.

November 2021: Committee members (Gorman, Schochat, Blackwell, Domby, and Froeschke) delivered the oral presentation titled “Advocacy and Capacity Building for Global Equity: The ASHA–PAHO Collaboration in Ecuador” at the ASHA Annual Convention in Washington, D.C. In this presentation, the presenters (1) summarized the overarching goal of the ASHA–PAHO initiative for strengthening knowledge and building capacity of professionals and organizations, (2) detailed the activities of the ASHA–PAHO Collaboration in Ecuador Ad Hoc Committee, and (3) discussed the importance of international engagement to address equity in access to evidence-based services.

December 2021: The closing ceremony was held virtually on December 15, 2021, to summarize and celebrate the successful completion of the training program. In total, 111 Ecuadorian professionals received training, which is approximately 25% of the phonoaudiology and speech-language workforce in the country. In attendance at the closing ceremony were representatives from the Ecuadorian MPH—including the Director of the National Directorate of Disabilities, PAHO—and members of the ASHA–PAHO Ad Hoc Committee. In addition, various participants attended to provide testimony regarding the training’s positive impact.

Academic Networking

In addition to participation of university faculty in the professional development to support a “train-the-trainers” model, this project has fostered the beginnings of what is envisioned to be a fruitful international collaboration that will advance research and education in communication sciences and disorders in Ecuador. Brenda Gorman has been meeting regularly with faculty from the University of Ecuador for the following purposes:

- to support their research endeavors—including their publication for, and presentation at, a future ASHA Convention
- to consult with them regarding their postgraduate program development in Ecuador

This collaborative activity is expanding the program’s impact and will also enhance the longevity of the ASHA–PAHO initiative’s benefits in Ecuador.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Ad Hoc Committee notes the numerous strengths of the Ecuadorian MPH team representatives and of the phonoaudiologists and speech-language therapists whom they had the honor to serve. In addition, we note the following continued opportunities and needs:

- **Continuity of personnel.** Despite significant turnover in governmental and MPH personnel throughout the course of the project, due to numerous political, economic, and COVID-19 challenges in Ecuador, it is fortunate that our primary MPH liaison was maintained. The stability of additional MPH personnel with whom we met during our initial assessment visit in 2019 would have facilitated and expedited the project timeline; nonetheless, our ability to maintain a consistent relationship with this one MPH representative, at a minimum, was critical to the program’s overall success during this unprecedented time.
- **System of local support.** In future projects, it is strongly recommended that there be greater and more consistent support for the primary MPH liaison, who plays a significant role in ensuring that the essential local work can succeed. Additional support could potentially come from zonal leaders to strengthen connections between the regions. The faculty from the Universidad de Cuenca with whom the Ad Hoc Committee chair developed a relationship were invaluable contributors. It was by sheer coincidence that these faculty members had been the university professors of our primary MPH representative; they had already established a personal relationship with him—and this reality encouraged perseverance of the program. The Ad Hoc Committee members highly recommend a strong system of local support for country representatives pursuing their involvement in a future ASHA–PAHO collaboration.
- **Importance of face-to-face instructional format.** The virtual format supported the ability of participants throughout the country to access the trainings; however, it restricted their direct interaction and engagement—things that had been more easily achieved during our on-site visit and interviews in 2019. The Ad Hoc Committee recommends the original plan of providing the training through a

combination of virtual and face-to-face delivery mechanisms to most fully support the development of strong relationships—with full knowledge that this can be achieved only under normal, non-COVID-19, circumstances.

- **Duration of training program.** Various participants commented that their previous education did not include the topics presented in the Ad Hoc Committee’s training modules and eagerly expressed interest in continued training, which requires a longer project commitment and potentially a more comprehensive compilation of available content and resources across projects.
- **Additional support for professionals in rural areas.** Most participants were located in urban areas of the country with better access to technology and services. Additional support is needed for professionals in rural areas.
- **Enhanced equity and access.** Access to high-quality and free or low-cost information is challenging and can compromise equity in client care. Evidence-based, validated Spanish materials and translations/adaptations that professionals in Ecuador can access are limited. Therefore, professionals often rely on Internet-based information that may or may not be valid or evidence-based. Of those Spanish materials and resources that do exist, a shared nomenclature for Spanish-speaking countries would support utility and access.

It has been a tremendous pleasure to serve in this capacity and to contribute to ASHA’s and PAHO’s global efforts to support the health and human rights of individuals with disabilities.

Respectively submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B Gorman", written over a horizontal line.

Brenda Gorman, PhD, CCC-SLP
Chair, Ad Hoc Committee to Provide Technical Assistance to MPH of Ecuador