Telepractice Ethics, Licensure, and Reimbursement

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ASHA’s Definition

• Telepractice is the application of telecommunications technology at a distance by linking clinician to client, or clinician to clinician for assessment, intervention, and/or consultation.

- ASHA 2004 position statement
  www.asha.org/telepractice.htm
What Telepractice Is Not

- Distance supervision or mentoring
  - Clinical Fellows (allowed by CFCC)
  - Students (up to university)
  - Assistants (no guidance from ASHA; check with state)

- Distance education
Necessary Clarifications

• Does it assume audio and visual connection?
• Are there specific standards?
• What service is being provided, e.g.:
  – Synchronous (real time) connection with qualified provider?
  – Access to online materials?
  – Self-paced programs?
  – Clinician-monitored programs?
Quality of Service

• Telepractice (telehealth) is an appropriate model of service delivery for the profession of speech-language pathology [and audiology]…The quality of the services delivered via telepractice must be consistent with the quality of services delivered face-to-face.”

--Position Statement
What is a Quality Service?

- Technology and connection appropriate for the service being delivered
- Counseling and involvement of others (parents, staff, administration)
- Appropriate documentation
- Conforms to ASHA Code of Ethics, Scope of Practice, and other official policies
Ethical/Legal Issues

- Appropriateness of clients for telespeech
- Competence of SLP to provide telespeech
  - See Knowledge and Skills, 2005
- Notification—particularly of minors or cognitively impaired clients
- Privacy
  - Environment
Other Issues

• Credentialing (hospital networks)
  – Joint Commission telemedicine requirements
• Consent/notification
• Malpractice
Licensure

- States showing interest in developing language
- Some have added (MD); others waiting (TX)
- Issue: full license required across states?
- Risks of licensure language: too restrictive
- ASHA creating model language
- NCSB discussing issues
Status of Reimbursement for Telehealth

- School contracts
- Medicaid
- Private insurance
- Medicare
School Contracts

• Prompted by shortages of SLPs and distances to rural school districts (e.g., ME, ND, OK, TX, NC)
• State Departments of Education engaging in partnering (e.g., Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia)
• Issues: need for good communication with teachers & facilitators; competition for bandwidth
Medicaid:  
www.cms.hhs.gov/Telemedicine

• “Telemedicine is viewed as a cost-effective alternative to the more traditional face-to-face way of providing medical care.” (Medicaid Overview)
• 23 states have regulations for reimbursement of telemedicine services
• Recently approved in Oklahoma for schools, including facility fee
• Available in Missouri when approved through Missouri Telehealth Network—in most settings except for schools
Private Health Plans

• Recommend obtaining advance approval
• Examples
  – Blue Cross/Blue Shield of North Dakota
  – Private insurer in Utah on case by case basis
• State laws mandating that private insurance reimburse covered services if provided via telehealth (Maine: LD 1073; NH SB 138)
Medicare

- SLPs and Audiologists not included as eligible telehealth providers under Medicare
- ASHA submitted application to add SLPs and audiologists as providers in 2003
- Collaborating with ATA and other organizations to add language for pilot program on stroke
ASHA’s Activities

• 1998 staff white paper
• 2001-2003 Focused Initiative
  – Grants, Medicare application, ASHA Leader, survey
• 2004-2005 Ad Hoc Committee: Policy documents
• 2007 Video and brochure
• 2008-2009 Ad Hoc Committee: Professional Issues document
ASHA’s Advocacy

• Part of ASHA’s Public Policy Agenda
• Work with state associations on Medicaid advocacy
• Identify states with telepractice mentioned in licensure law
  – Trend chart (http://www.asha.org/advocacy/state/StateLicensureTrends.htm)
• Work with other organizations on Medicare advocacy
ASHA’s Resources

- **Web page:** [http://www.asha.org/practice/telepractice/](http://www.asha.org/practice/telepractice/)
  - Policy documents
  - Bibliography
  - Streaming video
  - Leader articles featuring applications of telepractice in SLP and audiology
  - Other organizations
Other Resources

• American Telemedicine Association
  – Telerehab Special Interest Group
  – Practice guidelines from other professions
  – Reimbursement information; advocacy
• C-Tel (Center for Telehealth and eHealth Law)
  – Brown bag seminars
• Office for the Advancement of Telehealth
• Association of Telehealth Service Providers
For More Information

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