The Guyana Ad Hoc Committee was established by the ASHA Board of Directors to provide technical assistance to the Guyana Ministry of Health under the ASHA-PAHO collaboration. A panel will discuss their individual role in the establishment and maintenance of services to people with disabilities in Guyana.

Presentation Summary

Moderator/Presenter: Gloria Weddington, ASHA Ad Hoc Committee Chair

Presenters:

Erin Mercer, University of Guyana
Kari Comer, George Washington University
Keisha Lindsay, Howard University
Sulare Telford, Howard University
LaShundra Collins, Children National Medical Center
Samantha Kleinadinse Robler
Pamela Wiley, LA Speech & Language Therapy Center

Introduction

The Guyana Ministry of Health (MoH) instituted policies that address individual, social, institutional, and environmental factors that might have an impact on the ability of persons with disabilities to have access to the communities in which they live, work, and participate. The government passed the Persons with Disabilities Act and assembled a National Commission on Disabilities to oversee its implementation. Embedded within the national health strategy is Vision 2020, which projects that between 2014 and 2020, the people of Guyana would be among the healthiest people in the Caribbean through universal health coverage within a social context.

The number of persons with disabilities was found to be 6.4% in 2002. However, in 2014 the number was projected to be approximately 50,000 individuals who are found frequently at the lowest socioeconomic level, unemployed, over age 65, with poor health. The prevalence of persons with disabilities is increasing in Guyana resulting from more chronic diseases, accidents, and increased longevity. While the census does not isolate communication disorders, it is known that speech, language, and hearing disorders are concomitant as well as symptom of many disabling conditions.

According to the Guyana Ministry of Health: National Rehabilitation Services Strategy (2014-2020), among the goals is to improve services to persons with disabilities through strengthening the number of health services providers who would expand service utilization and demand, thus increasing screening and early detection. To this end, MoH joined forces with the American...
Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and instituted a partnership for ASHA to provide technical assistance to improve services to persons with communication disorders.

One speech-language clinician and one audiological physician, assisted by paraprofessionals in rehabilitation and audiology provide identification and intervention services for people with disabilities in Guyana. Without a university program that educates professionals in communication disorders, meeting the complex needs of the population is difficult. Sustainable services can be achieved when higher educational programs are available and aimed at recruiting local individuals from the various geographic districts in Guyana.

**ASHA Response**

ASHA established an ad hoc committee to provide technical support to the Guyana MoH. The goal is to assist Guyana to create a sustainable service delivery model by creating a curriculum at the University of Guyana (UG) that is consistent with speech-language pathology & audiology (SLP/A) programs in South America. The UG program offers a bachelor’s degree designed to educate students to delivery services in both SLP and A. Some graduates are expected to eventually teach in the program while others will work in the Ministries of Health and Education.

A Peace Corps Response volunteer coordinates the program at UG and teaches some of the speech-language pathology courses and the audiological physician teaches some of the audiology courses. ASHA volunteers teach courses via videoconference, online, and on-site in Guyana.

A second goal of the ad hoc committee is to recruit volunteers to assist the SLP and A with their large caseloads in Guyana and provide mentoring to the local clinician. In addition, volunteers are recruited to provide training for paraprofessionals and families of people with disabilities. At this point one SLP spent two weeks in August in Guyana assisting the local clinician to conduct assessments, intervention, and training of paraprofessionals and parents.

**The Session**

A two-hour panel discussion is being proposed to explain the accomplishments of one of the first countries selected for support through the ASHA-PAHO Collaboration. During the session, the panelists will explain to the audience the good work of the Guyana ad hoc committee and the volunteers who have given generously of their time and knowledge to work toward creating a sustainable service delivery model in a country with less than adequate services to people with disabilities. The panelists will also discuss their individual roles in contributing to the success of this project. Included in the discussion are the following:

- An explanation of the charge of the Guyana ad hoc committee
- A description of the services available in Guyana before the collaboration and the country’s solution to personnel shortages
- The creating of the curriculum for the university and recruitment of volunteers
- The selection of volunteers and the management of the volunteer teachers and students
e. Experiences of individual volunteers who have participated in teaching and service
delivery
f. Steps toward establishing sustainability

Session Agenda

5 minutes – Welcome & Introduction of panelists– Gloria Weddington
5 minutes – Project background – Weddington
15 minutes – Committee’s response to needs assessment - Kleindienst
10 minutes – First Impressions - Wiley
15 minutes – Unique needs of Caribbean countries – Lindsay
15 minutes – Volunteer account of service delivery in Guyana - Collins
15 minutes – Coordinating the program – Mercer
15 minutes – Teaching through distance learning – Comer
15 minutes – Teaching on-site - Telford
10 minutes – Conclusions & Questions – Weddington

Learning Outcomes: At the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Explain the ASHA-PAHO response to the needs of Guyana.
2. Summarize the steps Guyana has taken to expand service delivery to people with
disabilities in Guyana.
3. Describe factors in Guyana that contribute to limited services to the people of Guyana
with disabilities.
4. Explain the motivation of ASHA volunteers to donate time and money to this project.

Keywords: International Issues, PAHO, Guyana, International Programs, Developing Regions,
Volunteerism, Curriculum Development, South America

References

Guyana Ministry of Health, 2014 – 2020 National Rehabilitation Services Strategy (November
2014).