Audiologist Assistants: A Good Fit for Your Practice?

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WHY AN ASSISTANT??

- Expanded scope of practice
- Declining reimbursements
- Structured training program
- Flexibility in tasks
- The “Peanut Butter Syndrome”
- “Under supervision”
- Controlled scope—ownership/ethics
Formal Training Programs

- University-based programs: Nova Southeastern University; Bellevue University
- Organization-run programs: AIB; Department of Defense
- Oto-tech program (not an audiology model—ENT-based)
Formal Program: Nova Southeastern University

- Distance Learning
- Student must be sponsored by supervising audiologist
- Two modules
- Payment is per module
- 6-month completion time per module
Nova Southeastern: Module #1: Diagnostics

• Otoscopic Inspection
• Pure tone A/C threshold testing on patients who have had a comprehensive audiological evaluation by an audiologist
• Daily biological calibration checks
• Infection control duties
• Assisting with pediatric VRA, CPA, immittance and OAEs
• Prepping for evoked potentials and VNG—NOT performing those tests!
Nova Southeastern
Module #2: Amplification

• Otoscopic inspection
• Impressions for hearing aids/shells following audiologist inspection and monitoring
• Modifications of earmolds/shells
• In-office repairs and clean/checks/tubing changes
• Electroacoustic analysis
• Hearing aid orientation (insertion/removal VC adjusting, etc.)
Nova Southeastern
Module #2-continued

• Completing paperwork such as return forms, repairs, warranty information, etc.
• Administering a hearing aid satisfaction form
• Discussing assistive technology options with patients
Nova Southeastern: Miscellaneous

• Diagnostic A/C portion includes a copy of AudSim audiometer simulator with practice cases
• 100% distance learning
• Most assignments are completed in conjunction with the supervising audiologist on-site
• Pace is flexible
Bellevue University: Audiologist Assistant/Hearing Instrument Dispenser

• Distance Learning
• Two-12-week terms
• 4 classes each term
• Additional practicum components
Bellevue University: Part #1

- Introduction to Audiometry
- Hearing Aids Part 1
- Anatomy and Physiology
- Ear Impressions and Federal Regulations
Bellevue University: Part #2

- Hearing Aids Part 2
- Tympanometry/Otoacoustic Emissions
- Troubleshooting
- Infection Control
Formal Program: Department of Defense

- Military model: Resident training program (Shared with assisting ENTs)
  - Phase I: Academic/hands-on, 13 weeks
  - Phase II: In-clinic practicum, 12 weeks
- Supervision by an Audiologist, BOTH phases
- Program graduates receive a military certificate
Formal Program: Oto-Tech

NOT BASED ON MODEL OF A SUPERVISING AUDIOLOGIST!

- CPOP: Certificate Program for Otolaryngology Personnel (Sponsored by ENTs)
- Training course: 2 ½ days long
- Post-training 6 months for certain tasks
- Supervision by an ENT
Appropriate Tasks for an Audiologist Assistant

Goal:

To increase efficiency and overall audiologist “happiness” by delegating non-clinical and administrative duties to the audiology assistant.
Appropriate Tasks for an Audiologist Assistant

- Checking in hearing aid/earmold/repair orders
- Inventory management of hearing aid stock
- Ordering supplies (batteries, eartips, etc.)
- Clerical duties (A/R management, etc.)
- Hearing aid clean/checks—tubing changes, wax filters, use of suction chamber, receiver replacements, battery doors, cases, etc.)
- Assisting on pediatric testing (VRA, CPA, etc.)
Appropriate Tasks for an Audiologist Assistant

- Hearing aid care and use instructions (insertion/removal, cleaning, battery changing, etc.)
- Assisting with marketing events, health fairs, etc.
- Assist during balance testing (CRPs with TMT)
- Applying electrodes for evoked potentials
- Distracting children during OAEs and immittance testing
- Noah and software upgrades
- Use of automated testing for newborn hearing screening
Inappropriate Tasks for an Audiologist Assistant

- Any task that requires professional judgment
  - Diagnostic work of any kind
  - Hearing Aid prescriptive work
  - Making referrals
  - Violation of HA dispensing licensing law
  - Risky procedures
  - Etc.
Audiologist Assistants:

• My history with Audiologist Assistants
  The Good, the Bad and the Ugly
Our Audiologist Assistant - Deana
Audiologist Assistants:

• **10 vital traits** a great Audiologist Assistant should possess!
Audiologist Assistants:

• Good Communicator
Audiologist Assistants:

• Patience
Audiologist Assistants:

• Detail Oriented
Audiologist Assistants:

• Empathetic
Audiologist Assistants:

• Good Speaking Habits
Audiologist Assistants:

• Good Manual Dexterity
Audiologist Assistants:

• Professional
Audiologist Assistants:

• Adaptable
Audiologist Assistants:

• Strong sense of ethics
Audiologist Assistants:

• Team Player
Audiologist Assistants:

• So how do you find this great Audiologist Assistant?
Audiologist Assistants:

• Post a job ad with your local newspaper both in print and online
• Contact your local Technical College to post an open position on their job boards
• Contact local staffing agencies
• Contact your State or Local Unemployment and Workforce Commission Office
Audiologist Assistants:

• Post a job ad on-line
  • Indeed.com
  • Simplyhired.com
  • Careerbuilder.com
  • Craigslist.com
  • Backpage.com
  • Bullhornreach.com

• LinkedIn.com
• Ziprecruiter.com
Audiologist Assistants:

- So now that you have resumes in front of you.....

HOW DO YOU INTERVIEW THEM?
Audiologist Assistants:

• Ask Behavioral and Situational type questions
• Perform a Hands-on interview
Audiologist Assistants:

• Hands – On Interview:
  
  • Connect hearing aids to NOAH
  • Test batteries and then place them in hearing aids
  • Re-tube and glue a conventional earmold
  • Add a retention tail
  • Enter an audiogram into NOAH accurately
  • Perform a listening check with hearing devices
Audiologist Assistants:

• Compensation pay for an Audiologist Assistant - Straight salary or Base salary + bonus structure

• National Average is $15-17/hour
Audiologist Assistants:

• So now that you have hired your Great Audiologist Assistant......

WHAT DO YOU DO NEXT?
Audiologist Assistants:

• Train, Train, Train.....
• Goal is to ensure competency
• Document, Supervise and Monitor
• Outcome Measures
• You are ultimately responsible
Audiologist Assistants:

• Remember Audiologist Assistants can improve access to patient care by:
  • Increasing availability of audiology services.
  • Increase productivity by reducing wait times.
  • Reduce costs by performing tasks that do not require the professional skills of an Audiologist.
State Licensing Laws

• Designed to protect consumer—NOT to advance profession.
• Public is protected under these laws as there are safeguards, limits on activities and supervision requirements.
• Direct and indirect supervision is typically required.
• Scope varies greatly state by state.
• Recourse if patient is harmed by an assistant.
Some State Prohibit...

• Diagnostic services
• Any procedure that carries risk
• Treatment plan development
• Adjusting, fitting, dispensing hearing aids
• Making referrals
• Functioning without “direct” supervision (how defined)??!!
• Counseling---how defined??!!
What if Your State Does Not Mention Assistants?

• Be very cautious
  • It could be the unlicensed practice of audiology and/or hearing aid dispensing.
• Ask for an opinion, in writing from your state licensure boards (audiology and hearing aid dispensing).
• If the law is silent...
  • ...the safe approach is to NOT delegate to an assistant until you know, for sure!!
Assistants and Liability

• It is important to consult with your liability coverage vendor about whether or not audiologist assistants need separate liability coverage.
Assistants and Medicare and Medicaid

• Medicare and Medicaid do not cover the services provided by an audiologist assistant who is working under the supervision of an audiologist, regardless of their level of supervision.
Assistants and Private Insurance

• Private insurers may or may not cover the services provided by an audiologist assistant, regardless of supervision.
  • It is important to pose this question, in writing, to each payer.
  • It may be dependent on whether or not the audiologist assistant is licensed.
Audiologist Assistant versus Hearing Aid Dispenser

• Audiologist assistants cannot function independent of the supervising audiologist.
  • Less risk of them leaving your employment and setting up a competing practice.

• Hearing aid dispensers can function independently to test hearing for the sole purpose of obtaining amplification and in the fitting and management of hearing aids.
  • They can bill some insurance providers independently.
  • They require no audiology supervision.
  • Can function, in other tasks, as an audiologist assistant as well.
Questions?